Campione! Volume 17

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These are novel illustrations that were included in "Campione! Volume 17".

英雄の名
カンピオーネ!
Campione
XII
丈月城
シコルスキー

丈月 城

Illustration

シコルスキー

英雄の名

カンピオーネ！

Campione XVII

パラス・アテナ
エリカ
？？？
護堂
祐理
羅濠

「あ――っ。王様、ち、ちゃんと伝わった？」

「わ、私の方も大丈夫です。きっとお役に立ってみせますから――んんっ！」

「救世の神刀よ。
今こそ真の姿を世界に示せ」
背負った箱より愛刀を引き抜いて、
「最後の王」は目の前の地面に突き刺した。
すると、彼の頭上に巨大な正方形の魔方陣が顕現した。
辺の長さは一〇メートル前後。
魔方陣の正方形は格子模様で細かく仕切られており、
そのひとつひとつのなかに武具が描かれていた。

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丈月城

Illustration
シコルスキー

カンピオーネ！

英雄の名

Campione XII

あとがき
ロン毛さま
17をお買い上げ
ありがとう
ございます!!

Chapter 1 - Augury of the Hero

Part 1

Winter rain.

"Hmm..."

Prompted by the sudden shower, Luo Cuilian looked up at the dark sky.

Her residence was situated at Mount Lu in China's Jiangxi province. On a moment's whimsical fancy, she had decided to take a leisurely stroll deep in the mountain.

The accumulated snow had dyed the mountain scenery with the color of white.

Whether totally bare or still holding onto lingering leaves, all trees were enduring against bone-chilling wind and the weight of accumulated snow.

Melting and dripping, the snow solidified again as ice, forming transparent ice columns in various places. Snowflakes and mist drifted in the sky, adding a color of fantasy to this world of white and silver.

Standing in this snowscape that could be called a wonderland was the transcendent beauty, Luo Cuilian.

Her attire was traditional Han clothing of silk. The lapel was tied using ribbons, contributing to elegant airs as well as an image similar to the kimono's. The sleeves of her upper garment were wide and loose while the skirt hem was long enough to drag on the ground. Furthermore, it was currently raining.

Nevertheless, Luo Cuilian's clothing was not wet in the slightest .

Having reached the pinnacle of Daoist arts, it was mere child's play for her to employ a rain-blocking spell. In addition, the snow-covered ground showed no signs of either footprints or a trail from the dragging of her Han clothing's hem.

Tarnishing this land of white and silver were only the footprints of hares.

As though having turned the weight of both herself and her clothing into nothingness, she walked, jumped, dashed and demonstrated martial arts.

Were one unable to overcome an environment of this extent, how could one even claim proudly to have reached the pinnacle of the martial path?

...Hence, upon Mount Lu on a winter's day, nothing existed that could confound Luo Cuilian's beautiful face whose clarity and magnificence was akin to the moon's.

"Who could have expected rain on this very day...?"

Luo Cuilian's Daoist arts were even capable of summoning wind and rain through prayers to heaven.

Just by looking up at the sky, immersed in the wind, she could tell what weather would arrive the next day. Deciphering the climate of the deep mountains was no challenge to her.

Nevertheless, she had completely failed to sense the arrival of today's sudden shower.

"Some kind of monumental calamity manifesting between heaven and earth... Is that an augury?"

While she murmured to herself, the falling rain suddenly ceased at the same time.

The gray clouds dispersed with astounding speed as the winter sun was hung in the sky once more.

Thereafter, Luo Cuilian immediately had a vision.

Suspended in the sky, a white halo pierced the sun—This was the ominous sign witnessed. Luo Cuilian was also blessed with outstanding sensitivity in divination. This ability was able to call forth the oracles of spirit vision.

"The sun pierced by a white halo..."

Murmuring thus, Luo Cuilian turned around to make her way back.

There were things she must do as ruler of the martial realm and supreme [King].

In the middle of February, Kusanagi Godou finally returned to his homeland.

After arriving at Narita Airport from distant Italy, he then took an express train from the airport to Tokyo.

As it so happened, he got back to Japan on the last day of the vacation after the third term exams.

Although it was a brief trip on the calendar, for Godou and his companions, this was a great expedition spanning multiple months, traversing between the past and contemporary times.

"This journey sure makes one's heart resonate with emotion..."

Staring out at the scenery of the Bunkyou ward's streets, Liliana Kranjcar remarked emphatically.

Concurring "you can say that again," Godou smiled wryly. Having visited Tuscany in winter, ancient Gaul and the island of Sardinia, they had finally returned to Nezu's Area 3 in downtown Tokyo. One could call this a wholly intractable journey.

Driving the car to send the whole group here was Amakasu Touma of the History Compilation Committee.

They first made a trip to the Mariya residence at Toranomon in order to drop off the two sisters, Mariya Yuri and Hikari, along with Seishuuin Ena. Right now, Godou and Liliana as well as Erica Blandelli were getting off at Hongou Street.

"Well then, everyone, first get some rest today. If any emergency comes up, please contact me immediately."

"You're heading over to Kaoru-san's place next, Amakasu-san?"

Standing in the road, Erica asked Amakasu who was sitting in the driver's seat. The sun was almost about to set. Soon, a winter dusk was going to arrive.

"In that case, could you take me along? I have matters I'd like to discuss with her too."

"Unfortunately, I still have things to do, so I have to go to the library. That's the one the Committee manages in Aobadai. There's a few things I want to research."

"Is it about the 'King of the End'?"

"Yes, that's right. I'm very concerned about the spirit vision that Yuri-san received after hearing about the revived Athena's attack."

"Are you referring to this?"

Liliana nodded and interjected.

"An evil dragon in the sea. The dragon summoned wind and clouds to blot the sky and sun. Lightning flashed to illuminate the

sea. The king shot an arrow, piercing the dragon's chest—That was how it went, yes?"

"Yes. I think I've seen these words somewhere before."

Not expecting Amakasu to speak so candidly, Godou was surprised.

"So those are the poetic lines that Mariya said?"

"If that is the case, it could be a massive hint to unraveling the mystery of the 'King of the End.'"

"A segment from a certain land's heroic legend... This is the kind of impression I gathered from the passage."

Liliana leaned forward while Erica expressed her interest.

...In yonder days, there was an evil dragon in the sea. The evil dragon summoned wind and clouds to block the sun, causing violent lightning to descend upon the sea. The king immediately drew his bow and shot an arrow, wounding the dragon right in the chest—

That was roughly the content. A story about a hero vanquishing an evil dragon.

However, the History Compilation Committee's special agent smiled wryly and shrugged.

"I totally can't recall anything specific. Neither can I reject the possibility that I remembered wrong. So let me do some research first. As soon as I figure out anything, I'll call you guys."

"We will also contact you as soon as we receive news about the earlier incident."

Liliana sighed with worry after saying that.

"However, we really were too careless... I can't believe we let those two escape."

One was the gentle noblewoman who was staying in a remote village in the Italian region of Tuscany.

The other was the frivolous Italian young man who had been traveling with Godou before he left Sardinia.

Possessing both ridiculous powers and troublemaking ability, these two Campiones had shaken off surveillance personnel half a day earlier, suddenly going missing.

"That idiot Doni aside, I can't believe even Madame Aisha did the same."

Godou muttered in worry.

"I just hope she won't cause a mess."

"Godou, hoping alone is futile when pertaining to Madame Aisha. This disappearance is tantamount to pulling the trigger to a

massive disturbance in the future... That's the kind of feeling I get. Want to have a bet?"

"I agree fully with what you said, so there's no bet."

"These words can just as easily apply to Sir Salvatore too, right? Definitely unmistakable."

Godou nodded to agree with Erica's opinion while Liliana murmured as well.

Everyone was making rather blunt comments about the two terrifying Devil Kings.

"However, who we truly need to stay on guard against isn't those two. Rather, it's Pallas Athena... As the reincarnation of Athena, resurrected as a Divine Ancestor, and of course there is—"

Erica deliberately omitted the name, but Godou knew what she meant.

The king manifesting at era's end. The Devil King-exterminating hero. The "King of the End." The pale-haired aristocrat whom he had battled in ancient Gaul. The ultimate warrior whom the Divine Ancestors had spent a thousand years to locate.

Liliana also said to the silent Godou:

"According to Prince Alec's deductions, the 'King of the End' is sleeping in Tokyo Bay or perhaps somewhere in the surroundings. Even Pallas Athena should not be able to find him quickly... However, I am actually quite worried."

"What do you mean?"

"A giant disaster is approaching us with unimaginable speed—That is the feeling. It started slightly before we returned to Tokyo."

"..."

Godou sighed. Liliana was a witch with powerful spiritual senses. Furthermore, having experienced the journey to ancient Gaul, her spirit vision powers had increased further.

Perhaps that aristocrat was going to appear before Godou soon.

"But in any case, Athena and her companions' final destination is here, Tokyo Bay in Japan."

Godou summed up in a relaxed tone of voice.

Before the situation reached a state of emergency, there was no need to be on excessive alert.

"We will make preparations for intercepting the enemies when they arrive, so standing by for now is fine. If possible, I don't want to make a big deal out of things. Let's just recover our energy while gathering information from various sources."

In that case, resting in his own home was the best choice—

Seeing off Amakasu driving off in a domestic car and parting ways with Erica and Liliana at Hongou Street, Godou began to walk in the shopping district of Nezu's Area 3.

A used bookstore that had closed for business, located somewhere in this district, was Kusanagi Godou's home.

This shopping district, preserving the vestiges of Tokyo's traditional downtown culture, was still quite prosperous in contemporary times. This place was both the home of his family as well as his childhood friend. Also, there were many neighbors whom he had known for a very long time.

Standing at his hometown after what felt like an absence of several months, Godou took a deep breath.

The day of the inevitable battle—No, that was wrong. For the sake of the imminent battle, he must give his body and mind sufficient rest.

This was Kusanagi Godou's top priority at the moment.

Part 2

The state of Tirol in western Austria was where alpine skiing originated.

Naturally, the Alps would bear the onslaught of blizzards whenever winter arrived, turning the mountains into a pilgrimage site to where skiers flocked, professionals and amateurs alike.

After all, this was a land where people could have fun at skiing grounds set up on mountain glaciers even during the summer.

On this day, a girl was visiting the alpine valley of Ötztal in Tirol.

This was a region of deep snow surrounded by the Alps.

Naturally, settlements were concentrated in the lowlands of the valley. However, the girl's destination was neither a village nor a town of that sort.

From the municipality of Umhausen, she set off on a four-wheel-drive vehicle.

After an hour's drive, she reached a snow-covered forest and alighted on her own. Putting on the skis she had brought, she switched to traveling on foot.

"Thank you for bringing me here. Please send my regards to everyone in town."

"Are you really sure it's okay for me to leave you in this kind of place?"

In response to her cheerful gratitude, the middle-aged man, who was running a forestry business, asked with slight worry.

He was one of the frequent customers at a small cafe at the town of Umhausen. She recalled that there had been six or seven others there. She was on excellent terms with each and every one of them.

Using her customary smile, she had conversed with them, becoming friends within five minutes.

Asking "could one of you please drop me off somewhere close to that place?" at an opportune moment, she was brought to the mountains where only skiers and locals could enter.

Parting ways with the worried middle-aged man, she made her way to her destination alone.

Actually, it would be much easier if she could be dropped off at the destination itself, but that would incur the displeasure of the master there.

His forgiveness was only afforded to a single exception—In other words, it was okay for her to arrive alone. He was a problematic character who subjected others to violence and cruelty except for her.

Thus, she traveled along the snow-covered ground without roads for dozens of minutes.

In contrast to her frail appearance, she was quite outstanding in both stamina and athletic ability. Effortlessly overcoming the arduous journey, she finally arrived at the mountain villa that was her destination.

Built with a stylish design using a great quantity of white timber, it was an elegant building embodying the style of a winter mansion.

"Excuse me, is anybody home?"

Arriving before the entrance and knocking with the door's knocker, she called out in an adorable voice.

Five minutes later, the wooden door opened with a heavy creaking sound. Out came an old servant who worked at the mountain villa.

"Please pass this message along to *Onii-sama*. Recalling nostalgic feelings of the past, I have come to pay a visit."

"...Understood, Milady Aisha."

The old man knew her identity without her saying so.

Presumably, he had been present the last time she visited this mountain villa.

On the other hand, Aisha did not remember his face. However, she recalled that it was something like the 1980s on the western calendar. Most likely, his face must have changed greatly in the meantime.

Hence, Madame Aisha was taken to a great hall with a fireplace.

"Onii-sama" was currently next to the fireplace that was crackling with flames. Sitting on a wooden armchair crafted by a famous artisan, he had his legs crossed arrogantly.

Furthermore, hanging on his pale face was what could only be described as a scowl.

"...I must have said so before. Don't visit my residence for no reason."

"If you insist on such words, no one will come here to play. After all, you don't have many friends to begin with, Onii-sama."

"...And I have said this too: Don't shamelessly claim to be my friend."

"What friend? Nonsense! To you, Onii-sama, am I not your ' precious little sister'? Like family♪" replied Aisha to the old Devil King who kept uttering cold words.

A smile akin to a spring breeze adorned her face throughout.

Always clad in a solitary shadow, even though he had subordinates and worshipers, he had neither family nor friends. He should feel happy from the bottom of his heart for a reunion with Aisha. Probably.

He—Dejanstahl Voban—shook his head in annoyance.

"...To think you knew the location of my abode."

"I only found out after visiting so many people who used to serve you, Onii-sama. The third one happily told me."

"You used your charm authority. Happily my foot."

The Marquis addressed as "Onii-sama" replied with irritation.

Despite his intellectual appearance as an old gentleman, his propensity to speak discourteously remained the same as always.

To Aisha, Marquis Voban the oldest Campione had already been her ally since days past—Right, before the twentieth century.

During these past decades, he kept moving his residence between hotels and secluded locations in Europe.

Marquis Voban had been a wanderer since childhood. Like Aisha, he was unaccustomed to a settled life.

As the Marquis' temporary residence, this mountain villa was one of the assets managed by a subordinate of his.

"...I have said this before too: there is nothing to be gained in a protracted conversation with you. Hurry and be done with it. What brings you here today?"

"Oh fine. There is something I wanted to tell you, Onii-sama."

Finished with introductory words, Aisha immediately spoke:

"A great event is about to happen. It's a long story and various reminiscences are in order too... Please allow me to stay over, Onii-sama."

"Didn't I just ask you to hurry and be done with it?"

Onii-sama responded with a face of irritation, but Aisha still smiled with delight.

"Don't say such cold words. Actually, there are currently three heroes of steel on the move to revive the 'king who manifests at era's end'."

"Hoh."

As expected, a sharp gaze flashed in the eyes of the old man who stood as the most vicious godslayer.

"Naturally, although I do not regard you as a sister or a friend at all—"

Then he sat up slightly. Sitting steadily on the chair, his posture leaned forward a bit towards Aisha.

This was a fierce motion very similar to the way a crouching wolf slowly got up.

"Would it be possible to tell me, Aisha?"

"Certainly. Oh, excuse me. My body is a bit stiff from the cold, so could you get me something warm to drink?"

Aisha spoke to the old servant who was waiting on hand in a corner of the great hall.

"Also, please prepare comfortable heating in my room."

"...Do as she says," said Voban rather unhappily.

The old servant cautiously bowed his head and retreated out of the room.

Now with that, she had secured the night's lodgings and Onii-sama's curiosity. Feeling happy that her desire for a good long talk was going to be satisfied, Aisha beamed radiantly.

"Did you hear about it, Iceman?"

Alexandre Gascoigne was speaking to the knight, his trusted subordinate.

"A suspicious commotion started over in Greenwich yesterday. Those people in the Witenagemot are frantically gathering data

about the Asian region while those geezers of the Diogenes Club are pushing their old bones to hold meetings throughout the night. "

"Hoh," muttered Sir Iceman, the premier knight serving Alec.

They were at a private museum located in the outskirts of Cornwall, a rural town at the southern tip of England. This conversation was taking place between the two of them in the museum's entrance hall.

Having just returned, the young Devil King called out to stop Iceman who happened to be passing through.

As a side note, this museum was the headquarters of [Royal Arsenal] under their command.

"It reminds me of what happened six years ago. When [Heretic Arthur] manifested, it made you decide to cooperate with that princess."

"Ah yes. Also, just like last time... That woman is still not around."

The superior and subordinate were talking about Princess Alice in their respective ways.

Alec went "hmph" as he started to talk about the beauty, his old enemy.

"Her body apparently remains in the mansion at Greenwich while the ectoplasm continues to wander all over the place. That

woman must be chased down to gather information about this incident."

"If memory serves me correctly..."

After Alec declared his decision as the association's leader, Iceman responded sarcastically.

"Alec, you went away for a month without telling anyone and only came back three days ago. But now you're talking about another personal expedition?"

"That's neither here nor there. I can also sense quite an intense smell of gunpowder from this incident."

Dismissing his trusted subordinate's opinion rather readily, Alec made his declaration:

"There's nothing to lose in taking immediate action just to err on the side of caution. Although I'm sorry you'll have to continue holding the fort here, I'll be counting on you for the rest."

On this day, Godou received unexpected news through his cellphone.

After picking up the call which had no caller ID, he heard an old friend's nostalgic voice.

'I heard you went on a rampage in the world of the past, Kusanagi Godou.'

"It's you!"

He was hearing John Pluto Smith's voice again after many months.

The Campione of Los Angeles with an excessive penchant for self-performance. Although Godou was unable to see his masked face over the phone, that gentle tenor voice was still the same as before.

"Oh right. I've returned the borrowed item to Annie-san."

'Yes, I have already received it. That gun is in my hand right now.'

"You helped me out a lot in various ways. Thank you."

'Do not pay the matter a second thought. One day, you will repay me with interest.'

—How do you know my phone number when I've never told you? Godou decided that this was an unnecessarily tactless question, so he expressed his thanks for the magic gun instead and Smith graciously accepted his gratitude.

This was a conversation taking place several months after they last parted at Nikkou.

However, Godou was able to chat fluently with Smith as though making smalltalk.

Among the ranks of the Campiones that were filled with problematic characters, this man was the only one with whom Godou could build a positive relationship.

But John Pluto Smith was definitely not a respectable person. After all, he was eccentric in name and in fact, someone who devoted his efforts to a cosplay hero's activities every night.

Realizing this fact, Godou smiled wryly.

'Apart from that, I've heard many rumors. About the "King of the End," about Athena, about that noblewoman and the handsome Italian man going missing—'

"So Annie-san and Alice-san are your sources...?"

Annie was the American woman who served as Smith's collaborator whereas Alice was the duke's daughter with the blonde curls. Godou had also received plenty of help from them during the ancient Gaul incident.

'Then allow me to clarify my policy beforehand. At the current stage, I have no intention of heading over to intervene in Japan. That's that.'

"I really appreciate that."

'Indeed. Considering it's you, I knew you would answer like that.'

Smith's way of putting things made Godou laugh.

The masked eccentric intended to assist Kusanagi Godou through non-intervention.

During the battle at Nikkou, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong, was able to amplify his own power so long as he was facing two or more Campiones. The "King of the End" also possessed the same ability. If he were to do the same thing again—

In light of that, Godou did not wish for any Campione to visit Japan on whim.

This was Godou's honest opinion. The same thought presumably occurred to Smith too.

'However, since our two peers' whereabouts are currently unknown, it is possible that my policy of non-intervention might end up meaningless and will be terminated.'

"Seriously. I really hope those guys can read situations a little."

'So it is decided. May fortune stay by your side.'

Thus ended the phone call with Los Angeles' guardian saint. Still wearing a wry smile, Godou hung up.

"Your Majesty, was that America's [King] who called just now?"

"Yeah, that Smith guy."

Asked by Ena who was present, Godou briefly described what the conversation was about.

They were currently at the study in the Sayanomiya residence at Area 3 of the Chiyoda ward. Sayanomiya Kaoru, a member of the History Compilation Commitee's core leadership, as well as the two premier Hime-Miko—namely, Seishuuin Ena and Mariya Yuri—were present.

"So Smith-sama expressed that kind of opinion—"

"Indeed, it is very helpful of him."

Yuri spoke softly with an expression gratitude while Kaoru nodded happily.

"The arrival of Pallas Athena and the three heroic gods is already the biggest disaster. If the various Devil Kings make their way to Japan successively, the islands of Japan are surely going to sink."

"..."

Godou originally wanted to answer Kaoru's lighthearted joke, but could not think of anything to say, because somewhere in the back of his mind, he considered the possibility of that really coming true.

"However."

On the other hand, the Hime-Miko of the Sword started speaking again in her usual carefree attitude.

"On further thought, both King Salvatore and Aisha-san already know about that Devil King-exterminating authority. Shouldn't we take precautionary actions in this area?"

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven had also imitated this authority of divine power amplification.

It was said to be a power invoked by the gods for the sake of slaughtering their mortal enemies, the Devil Kings, wiping them off the entire earth. The power of the ordained hero, only conferred upon a certain pale-haired aristocrat.

"Definitely true, that's the only piece of information that's clear so far."

Godou nodded in agreement.

"That idiot Doni is only good at tactical planning while Aisha-san's ability to survive is quite outstanding. There shouldn't be any problems from Gascoigne and old man Voban, so the only real risk turns out to be—"

Recalling a certain haughty character, Godou muttered.

A certain character who had participated in the battle against the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, personally experiencing the power of Devil King-extermination.

Furthermore, she was touted as lacking in neither valor nor intelligence. Even so, it was hard to imagine her fighting cautiously just because of that ridiculous power up.

"It's Nee-san after all, I guess..."

"Her Eminence Luo Hao... Umm, Godou-san. Actually, there is something I need to tell you."

Hesitating for an instant whether she ought to speak, Yuri then continued:

"Although I am unsure whether it pertains to Her Eminence Luo Hao, recently, I have felt this kind of feeling. An aura of calamity—It is currently approaching Japan from the southwest direction."

An oracle spoken by the Hime-Miko with the highest level of spirit vision power in the world.

Godou felt greatly surprised. His sworn elder sister, Luo Cuilian, made her residence at Mount Lu in China's Jiangxi province. Simply stated, it definitely was southwest relative to Tokyo.

Could this be considered coincidence? Meanwhile, Kaoru spoke up:

"Actually, I've already asked Lu-kun for a favor just to be safe."

"What did you ask Yinghua to do?"

"In order to prevent news regarding this incident—Pallas Athena, the three heroes as well as the 'King of the End'—from reaching Her Eminence's ears at all, I asked him to secure the cooperation of those involved on that side."

That side. Kaoru was referring to the Holy Cult of the Five Mountains that revered Luo Cuilian as the Holy Cult Leader, as well as the Chinese martial arts circle that pledged allegiance to her as the most powerful martial artist of all time. Godou jumped in fright.

"She is someone who isolates herself from the mundane world and makes her residence deep in the mountains that resemble a wonderland. With Lu-kun first and foremost, there are only a handful of individuals who are able to make contact with her. If it works out, this method should be able to prevent Her Eminence from intervening..."

This was an arrangement very much in Sayanomiya Kaoru's wise style. Yuri and Ena's faces instantly brightened up.

Nevertheless, Godou's cellphone rang at this time. He had received a text message. Feeling a sense of foreboding, he checked it and saw that it was from Lu Yinghua.

"Nee-san has disappeared... She can't be found anywhere on Mount Lu?"

An ominous report had suddenly arrived.

Part 3

"I'm not the one scouting out the convent at Mount Lu."

This was the young man, Lu Yinghua, who stood as Luo Cuilian's one and only direct disciple.

A young leader from Hong Kong's Lu family, a clan of outlaws with a long and distinguished history, the handsome youth had entered Godou's room. Speaking of which, he actually did not come in through the main door either.

Godou's room was on the second floor. Lu Yinghua had suddenly entered through the window.

True to his epithet of "superiority in lightness," Lu Yinghua's agility was beyond even that of Liliana and Ena.

As a side note, the view outside the window was the sky adorned by an evening glow. It was precisely the bustling hour when residents in the vicinity of Nezu's Area 3 shopping district would go out to shop for dinner ingredients.

"Reportedly, the convent was discovered to be empty only when the Holy Cult's Glorious Messenger of the Right made his semiannual visit. Hence, a search all over Mount Lu failed to find any signs of her—"

After hearing about a mysterious position in the cult and the whole story of what had happened, Godou scratched his head.

Lu Yinghua had sent his text yesterday. To deliver a detailed report, he then went out of his way to visit the Kusanagi home.

"Even if she's not on Mount Lu, it's possible that she might be somewhere else nearby in the mountain range. At least she probably hasn't gone to urban areas."

"Why is that?"

"Because there hasn't been news like some city in eastern Asia getting destroyed."

Lu Yinghua's expression was quite serious.

He probably had no intention of making a joke. As expected of someone who knew the absurd personality of Luo Cuilian, the demonic cult leader, best.

"Whether Master's disappearance is connected to the 'King of the End' or not, let's reserve our opinion on that for the current stage."

"I agree. But you make it sound like she'll do things exceeding your worst expectations any time."

"It's the same with every Devil King, the Campiones. Including you, Honored Uncle."

"..."

Godou was unable to raise his objections against Lu Yinghua's comment that appeared to stem from deep enlightenment.

"Anyway, I'll do everything I can in this matter—"

Mid-sentence, Lu Yinghua vanished.

More accurately, he had jumped backwards so quickly that an ordinary human's dynamic vision would only have registered "an instantaneous shadow," opening the closed window without any sound and leaving the room.

It was definitely like a flash of lightning. As quick as wind.

Godou was only able to comprehend thanks to his familiarity with Lu Yinghua's skills.

Just as he was puzzling why Lu Yinghua had left, Godou heard footsteps on the wooden staircase.

"Onii-chan, who is there with you?"

Someone called to him from outside the door. His little sister Shizuka had arrived.

"...No one. I'm alone right now."

"Okay, then I'm opening the door."

A moment later, the room door was opened and Shizuka entered. She looked at Godou with a weird expression while staring with full surprise at the window that was wide open despite the winter weather.

"Was it my imagination...?"

"What's with you?"

"I heard a boy's voice from the second floor—Something like that. I even thought it was him, that guy with the family name of Lu."

"If he really were here, what were you planning to do?"

"Have a chat with him and ask for his phone number and email address. If he's willing, maybe even set a date to meet up some time. He always makes me curious."

If these were the seeds of a budding romance between young boys and girls, perhaps Godou should offer his assistance.

However, Kusanagi Shizuka was very similar to her mother and was born with a queenly aura. What she said about meeting up could probably be replaced by the word "summon." Very probably .

To prevent the misogynistic Lu Yinghua from suffering unnecessary hardship, Godou decided to feign ignorance to the very end.

"Oh okay. I'll ask him next time I see him."

"Whatever. Even without you worrying, Onii-chan, I can still make friends on my own."

Hearing Shizuka's indifferent response, Godou nodded generously.

The fact that he mentally replaced "friends" with "flunkies" must be kept secret.

"Oh right, Asuka-chan invited us just now. Basically, to go out with her to have okonomiyaki for dinner. Do you wanna go, Onii-chan?"

"Sure. Grandpa should be coming home quite late tonight."

"Okay. Then let's head over to Asuka-chan's place at 7pm or so tonight."

Tokunaga Asuka, the Kusanagi siblings' childhood friend, lived at a nearby sushi shop.

Hence, Shizuka left the room. Godou could hear her quick lively footsteps descending the staircase. Lu Yinghua proceeded to return to the room lightly from the window.

"...You noticed from the sound?"

"Yeah. Because I heard footsteps from the staircase, I realized she was coming up."

Hearing approaching footsteps downstairs even in a building constructed from steel-reinforced concrete and correctly deducing the identity of the approaching person as well—

Lu Yinghua had acquired superhuman hearing as a result of his harsh training as Luo Cuilian's disciple.

At merely the tender age of fourteen, he definitely deserved to be called a promising young star, a martial arts prodigy.

...However, apart from genius talent, he was also burdened with many negative assets including "being forced to endure inhumanely cruel training since early childhood," "living a life of seclusion for over eight years in the mountains since the age of three," "a great quantity of mental trauma giving rise to latent hostility towards women," ...etc.

"I have embarrassed myself in front of you, Honored Uncle."

"Of course not, you already have many things troubling you to begin with. Not increasing the number of hassles would be best. I agree too."

The two of them had experienced many hardships due to female relationships.

There were many things they could mutually understand without needing long explanations. Like those girls who were close to Godou as companions, with Erica first and foremost, Lu Yinghua was a trusted comrade as well, but in a different sense.

Hence, after returning home, Kusanagi Godou was preparing for the predicted state of emergency.

However, he still went to school properly every day and had normal contact with family members such as his sister, mother and grandfather. As for interacting with neighbors, he would occasionally chat with his childhood friend, Asuka.

Although this was only to rest his body and mind, Godou experienced an incredible feeling.

As the days went by, one at a time, he felt his body's functions gradually grow stronger.

He was almost like an athlete carefully adjusting his body in preparation for a world competition.

What was recuperating was most likely the deepest parts of his body and mind.

The decisive battle was imminent.

As a godslaying warrior, a Campione's body and mind would subconsciously adjust Kusanagi Godou to peak condition in preparation for the decisive battle against mortal enemies.

That was probably the case.

When Amakasu Touma contacted him, Godou was able to react with composure.

'Kusanagi-san, it's now clear what the threat coming from southwest is.'

Several days after his return, Godou happened to receive a call just as he was going home from school.

'Athena—no, Pallas Athena—did not head to Japan directly. For the past few days, she was apparently present at the South China Sea. Namely, a small island somewhere between Taiwan and the Philippines."

The South China Sea. From Tokyo's perspective, that was indeed in the southwestern direction.

'She seems to have conducted an unidentified summoning ritual there. Leading multiple serpentine divine beasts, entering the Pacific Ocean from the South China Sea, she is currently advancing northwards without impediment. Rather rapidly by following the Kuroshio Current. That's the same method as the goddess who appeared at New Year's—Circe."

"Based on what you said, could it be that she discovered power there that was left behind by Circe, intending to reuse it?"

This was just a random guess, but it was probably not far from the truth.

Pallas Athena was not Athena. It was impossible to imagine her employing a pack of divine beasts back when she was a goddess. There was probably a trick in there somewhere.

Hence, Amakasu smiled wryly on the other side.

'You noticed it too huh, Kusanagi-san? Actually, our members made the same speculation. However, the previous goddess landed at Cape Inubou, but this time, it'll probably be—"

Tokyo Bay. Perhaps the destination was the sea where the "King of the End" was sleeping.

In response to the History Compilation Committee's special agent's announcement, Godou replied quite calmly.

"Umm, I'm sorry but could you pick us up near the school? Also , it'd be best if you could bring Seishuuin as well."

'Roger that. It will be done as the king decreed.'

Making a joke that did not sound funny to Godou at all, Amakasu ended the emergency conversation.

Godou hung up and gazed at his companion beside him.

The two of them were traveling together by chance along the way home from school. Tossing her head of red-tinted blonde hair, Erica Blandelli smiled, dressed in school uniform.

It was as though she found the conversation just now quite funny.

"Godou, you've become quite reliable. Even though you've been a Campione for less than a year."

"It's currently the latter part of February. The first anniversary happens to be a month away."

Calculating the time just for kicks, Godou muttered.

"How rare to have a year of such hardship."

"For me, Erica Blandelli, I'll have you know that this was a year of many joyful happenings. I really ended up dragging quite an amazing character onto the world stage."

"How does it count as you dragging me along, Erica?"

Godou shrugged at his companion who had provided mutual support ever since the beginning of everything.

"It was reaping what I sowed and going with the flow that made me walk the path I have trodden so far."

"Naturally, I intend to accompany you till eternity, because I am Kusanagi Godou's first knight and at the same time, the most beloved lover. You ought to understand that, right?"

Naturally. That was why Godou had asked Amakasu to pick " us" up.

But Godou did not voice these thoughts, instead nodding to respond. This alone was enough to make Erica smile with satisfaction, bowing her head gracefully. This was a knight's etiquette.

"Yuri and Lily are probably still in the school's vicinity. Let's call them over."

"I've already asked Amakasu-san to pick up Seishuuin. Although I feel bad about it every time, once again, I'll be counting on you all as always."

Even Godou felt that this was quite an irresponsible demand.

But there was no helping it. Before the decisive battle, it was hard to predict what was going to happen. In Kusanagi Godou's book, there was no policy apart from "going with the flow and adapting to changes."

The quick-witted female knight smiled lightly.

"I feel truly fortunate for possessing the talent and capability to compensate for your flaws, Godou. I really hope you can express sufficient gratitude to me."

"Of course. I've always appreciated you."

These were his honest feelings without any pretense at all.

Thus, the adventure surrounding the "King of the End" was now off to an official start.

Although Kusanagi Godou had survived many battles since becoming a Campione, the upcoming fight was going to be the most difficult trial. This was the truth beyond a doubt.

Chapter 2 - Return of the Gods

Part 1

Pallas Athena had originally decided to head to the Far East directly.

The eastern end of the continent. A land comprising many long and narrow islands in the shape of a serpentine dragon, the humans apparently called it the islands of Japan. A place gathering cultures and ethnicities that had crossed over from the mainland.

However, while making preparations for the imminent battle, before landing—

A thought occurred to her. The Wind King and the three heroes were all reliable warriors.

Nevertheless, it was difficult to rely on them when facing a *critical moment*. Also, *there was a traitor in their midst*.

Hence, raising a Divine Ancestor's spiritual senses to the max, she fortuitously discovered remnants of divine power floating on the sea to the south.

The name of the deity was Circe. The witch goddess who had lost her life at this place several months earlier.

Seeing this through a spirit vision, Pallas Athena smiled valorously.

The goddess had lived in seclusion with divine beasts together on a mysterious island in a corner of the vast South Seas. If these sacred fragments of divine power could be gathered—

Hence, Pallas Athena landed on this tiny remote island on the South Seas.

Using the magic of the Divine Ancestors to perform a ritual over several days and nights, she gathered the remnants of divine power as though extracting salt from seawater, then injected temporary form and life into them...

Then on the night of a full moon, the ritual was complete.

Seven divine beasts were born, all in the form of giant sea serpents.

"Although impossible to sustain for long... 'Tis no matter."

Pallas Athena was not a goddess. Her former divine powers were already lost.

Be that as it may, having merged into one mind and one body with the Magic Holy Grail, she was more powerful than any Divine Ancestor throughout the ages. Even so, she still could not reach the domain of the gods.

Although divine beasts were created, they could only last two or three days at most.

Still, this was enough. Enough to be used in Pallas Athena's task .

Satisfied, she transformed into an owl to set off towards the islands of Japan from the South Seas. Towards the blue sea shining under the sun.

Needless to say, her current form was obviously that of a nocturnal bird of prey rather than a seabird.

However, this was a magic bird transformation using a Divine Ancestor's secret arts.

Even traveling from a tiny island in the middle of the vast ocean to the islands of Japan thousands of miles away, it would only take a couple hours of flying time.

Moving at the same speed as the south wind, Pallas Athena flew at low altitude near the sea surface.

The seven serpents also swam on the sea at the same speed, following along. Their target was in the northeast direction. The promised land where the "King of the End" slept.

Now, all preparations were complete.

Feeling satisfied, Pallas Athena suddenly sensed the Wind King's presence.

The war god, whose identity was hidden behind a mask and the strips of cloth wrapped around his entire body, was flying beside her in the form of an air current.

Athena laughed fiercely in her owl form.

"Be thou at ease. One shan't forget the mission one must accomplish as a Divine Ancestor. The king manifesting at era's end shall verily descend upon the world once more."

Meanwhile, she also delivered a strong declaration.

In order to actualize Pallas Athena's dearest wish, there were things that must be done.

After receiving the report of Pallas Athena's incoming invasion, Godou and his companions quickly gathered.

Godou, Erica, Yuri, Liliana, Ena and Amakasu.

As a side note, Ena was still wearing her usual uniform, but the other girls had already changed. Yuri was dressed in her miko outfit while Erica was in sporty attire with a black blouson and black pants. On the other hand, Liliana had a black blouse with skinny jeans.

Of course, the two knights did not forget to put on their usual capes.

Their capes were striped in the *rossonero* and *nerazzurro* colors of their respective associations.

All members of the group were already familiar with one another. They all knew one another's personalities well and there were no issues in distributing roles and responsibilities.

Arriving as the driver as usual, Amakasu brought Godou and company to an unexpected place.

At a university hospital near Jounan Academy—

Just as he was taken to the roof, Godou finally realized Amakasu's intent.

"I arranged for this because I thought it'd get us there in the shortest time!"

Amakasu was yelling over the noise of the spinning rotor.

A helicopter used by the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force for transporting supplies had landed on the helipad on the hospital's roof. After taking a seat in the cabin, Erica instantly urged:

"In any case, let's first fly over to Tokyo Bay, shall we?"

"No..."

Liliana shook her head.

"I feel like I can sense where Pallas Athena will be coming from. Amakasu Touma, can you fly in the direction I am going to indicate?"

"Of course. Did you receive a hint through spirit vision?"

The silver-haired female knight nodded firmly.

Indeed, Liliana's spirit vision powers had grown even sharper than before. And on further thought, Liliana had also made close contact with Athena during the Naples incident. Perhaps it was an effect from that experience.

Hence, the helicopter took to the skies above Tokyo. The sun was already beginning to set in the west.

"By the way, Yuri-san."

Amakasu suddenly spoke to the Hime-Miko.

"Speaking of oracles from spirit vision, if I borrow your assistance, is it possible for you to peer into the literature I read in the past?"

Yuri was taken aback by this unreasonable request.

"Are you referring to the literary source for the verses I saw in a spirit vision last time?"

"Yes, that's the one. Oh my, I've been re-reading all the ancient texts and research reports I've read before at home and in the library. But I couldn't find it in any of them."

In yonder days, there was an evil dragon in the sea—The source for this excerpt still seemed unclear.

"Something so convenient is probably impossible. My spirit vision powers are very unpredictable, which is something you ought to know very well, Amakasu-san?"

"Sure, if it doesn't work, never mind."

"Oh, but then again..."

Taking the place of the ninja descendent who was putting on an insincere smile, the other Hime-Miko grinned as well.

"Although Amakasu-san's feelings are understandable, even though Yuri always says 'impossible,' it's true that Yuri often manages to see various things through spirit vision. Why not try it out with a shred of hope?"

"To hear something like that even from you, Ena-san..."

Sitting on a simple seat in the helicopter, Yuri shrank back in embarrassment. Meanwhile, Ena watched her friend with a pleased smile then said in a joking tone of voice:

"By the way, Ena does have some idea where Liliana-san wants to go. That being said, it wasn't an oracle."

"Eh, really?"

Godou felt surprised, not expecting such an announcement from Ena who did not possess the power of spirit vision. However, even Erica, who was equally lacking in this type of ability, nodded as well.

"I can make a rough guess too. You still haven't figured it out, Godou?"

Hearing her say that, Godou looked out from the helicopter.

As though tracing the Aqua-Line connecting Tokyo to the Bousou Peninsula, the helicopter was crossing Tokyo Bay.

Ahead of them, a beach could be seen, dyed orange by the setting sun.

Speaking of the area next to the Aqua-Line interchange at the Bousou Peninsula, Godou remembered it should be Kisarazu.

"Oh I see, it's that place."

Although slightly late, Godou finally understood.

After arriving at Kisarazu, Liliana ordered the helicopter to land on the beach.

Godou got off the helicopter alone on purpose.

Carrying the others, the helicopter ascended into the sky again. They were planning to wait on standby at a sufficiently distant location, so as to provide Godou with support at the right opportunity.

If the same lightning of salvation were to fall like last time, a scorched plain would be created on the beach again.

It was only natural to take precautions against that. Godou swept his gaze over the Kisarazu beach again.

Several months prior, this was the battlefield that had witnessed the goddess Athena's final moments. The beach that Lancelot's Divine Sword of Salvation had devastated back then was a couple kilometers up ahead.

Then an hour or two passed after Godou's arrival.

Just as the dusk sky was about to turn into the darkness of the night, Godou finally saw his enemy's figure.

An owl flying from the other side of the Pacific Ocean like a seabird—Pallas Athena landed on the beach while transforming into a silver-haired girl.

Pallas Athena touched the ground not far in front of Godou.

And then giant snakes—seven serpents, each almost twenty meters long—crawled out from the sea, surrounding Godou and Pallas Athena.

HIIIIIIIIIIIISSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS!

The seven serpents howled acutely while raising their scythe-like necks at the same time.

However, this dangerous encirclement was absolutely not drawn in closely around Godou and Pallas Athena's location. Instead, there was roughly a fifty-meter radius from the center where the two of them stood.

"One was informed by a vague premonition."

Pallas Athena smiled courageously—a courageous smile identical to Athena's.

"Mine enemy of ill fate, Kusanagi Godou. By coming to this place, one would encounter thee here."

"I'm glad I raised your hopes. However, this really is a place of intersecting fates."

Could it be that something engraved deeply in her soul told her, despite her loss of memory?

Deciding not to dwell upon the thought, Godou fixed his gaze upon Pallas Athena. Now that they were meeting again here in this manner, that sort of thing would be nothing more than a trivial detail.

"I owe a debt to your late incarnation, but frankly speaking, I've no intention of paying it back immediately. Still—"

Godou muttered.

"If you're thinking of waking up a dangerous guy like the 'King of the End,' I will temporarily put aside my pacifism and do everything I can to stop you."

"Then one shall answer immediately, if that is the case."

Athena gazed haughtily at Kusanagi Godou and spoke quietly.

Despite her petite stature, Godou felt as though she was staring down at him from the heavens.

"Ushering the great hero's return to the earth is one's mission as a Divine Ancestor. Kusanagi Godou, thou shalt see if thy godslaying authority could kill one. Furthermore—"

A medallion suddenly appeared in Pallas Athena's right hand.

The divine artifact made of iron and gold—the [Arrowhead's Discus]. Godou entered a stance in preparation. His opponent was going to summon the three heroes at last, thereby summoning her full forces. However.

"O Wind King. Thou shalt take them and follow the plan."

Pallas Athena tossed the medallion behind her.

Manifesting with a whirlwind, the Wind King caught the medallion, his entire body still wrapped in strips of cloth, his face hidden behind a mask.

Then with the medallion in hand, the Wind King soared through the sky.

Rising up rapidly in an instant, he was flying towards an altitude even higher than the clouds floating in the dusk sky.

What exactly did she want that enigmatic god to do?

Filled with doubt, Godou asked a question.

"Is this really okay? If that guy and the medallion aren't here—this may sound rude—but you can't defeat me on your own, right?"

A Divine Ancestor was not a goddess. Pallas Athena was not Athena.

Even in command of an army of divine beasts, she could not possibly defeat Kusanagi Godou the godslayer.

Nevertheless, Athena scoffed at this accusation.

"That is thy misconception. This technique also belongeth to the Divine Ancestors..."

Then Godou was shocked. He had not expected this development at all.

Pallas Athena underwent a change again. Instead of turning into an owl, her body became more mature. From looking twelve or thirteen years of age, she now took on the image of a seventeen or eighteen-year-old girl.

Glimmering like moonlight, her silver hair extended down to waist length.

Then her silver hair turned into snakes. Pallas Athena had turned into the female monster with countless tiny snakes growing from her head—Medusa.

Furthermore, Pallas Athena's lower body transformed into a snake's thick torso, coiled up on the beach.

Her height even increased by three fold, allowing her to physically look down upon Godou.

Taking on the form of a giant serpentine monstrosity, the Divine Ancestor released a pulse of sacred energy. This solemnity was undoubtedly a goddess' aura.

A Campione's instinct told Godou that a deity was right before his eyes.

Godou's body and mind became filled with power. Power to fight the [Heretic Gods].

"You removed the seal of dragons and snakes...!"

This was the trump card used by former Witch Queen Guinevere and Asherah who had appeared at Nikkou.

Abandoning eternal life and youth as a price to regain the divinity of their past lives—as goddesses. Nevertheless, they would soon perish after using this move.

Confronted with this situation, Pallas Athena had used her trump card without hesitation.

Faced with the opponent's excessively unexpected action, Godou was filled with terror.

Regardless of Pallas Athena's true intent, this was a crisis without any avenues of escape. Not only was he facing the snake monster of a goddess, but also the seven serpentine divine beasts under her command, currently encircling them.

A beast's savage grin naturally surfaced on the corners of Godou's lips.

Part 2

Having transformed into a goddess, Pallas Athena had turned into the snake monster Medusa.

Her size had tripled compared to her form as a young maiden.

The enormous body was standing roughly five meters in height. However, since the lower half of the body was also long and serpentine, the total length most likely reached twelve or thirteen meters.

As enormous as a divine beast. And held in her right hand was a long-shafted scythe.

The great scythe used by a chthonic deity of death. This was her favorite weapon back in her days as Athena.

"Submit before the light of the goddess' eyes, Kusanagi Godou. One shall hereby strike down the life of a godslayer's!"

Pallas Athena declared haughtily while backing away.

Instead, the seven serpents surrounding Godou moved forward .

Naturally, the encirclement closed in. At this rate, they were going to gang up on Godou and massacre him. Also, Pallas Athena's spell words had shared a large amount of divine power with the serpents under her command. This was what one would call a stance of assured slaughter.

Then the seven serpents suddenly accelerated.

Despite being twenty meters in length, they moved with unbelievable agility and lightning speed.

One could not possibly survive this using ordinary methods. However, Godou held his ground while surrounded. Just as the serpents were about to pounce on him—

"Do it! Blow them away!"

He issued concise orders. In that very instant...

Strong wind was suddenly produced underneath Godou.

This was a supernatural storm accompanied by shockwaves. Standing at merely 180cm in height, Godou handily blew away the serpents that were trying to crush him to death.

These giant serpents, their total weight most likely exceeding hundreds of tons, were effortlessly—

Godou's counterattacking shockwaves were extremely swift and powerful. Struck by this attack, the serpentine divine beasts were damaged directly to their core, utterly pulverizing their bones.

Then a rumbling came from underground.

ROOOOOOOOOOOAR—!

A fierce beast's howl. A giant boar—twenty meters in length—rose up behind Godou. He must have summoned it the moment just before getting struck by the serpents.

Indeed! It was the [Boar], Verethragna's fifth incarnation.

"...I don't plan on staying too long in the wrestling ring with a battle royale between giant monsters, so let me take care of this in one go."

Godou shouted at Pallas Athena's giant body that had stayed in the back.

Instead of letting the [Boar] materialize instantly, Godou had ordered it to fire its prided shockwaves before summoning it to the ground. Godou had further mastered Verethragna's authority over the ten incarnations, allowing utilization to this extent.

Meanwhile, the liberated [Boar] began to extend the length of its howls.

ROOOOOOOOAAAAAAR—!

Then it charged at Pallas Athena's enlarged form that was known as Medusa.

"Hmph. Servants of mine, ye shall receive new life."

The snake goddess calmly chanted spell words.

"Turn into the divine shield [Aegis]!"

The seven serpentine divine beasts were lying pitifully on the beach, awaiting the arrival of death.

They suddenly turned into glowing particles, retaining the serpents' shapes for only a brief moment before flying to the front of Pallas Athena, combining into a new form—A shield of bronze. It was a giant rectangular shield.

Even without any support, the shield hovered in the air on its own. Its size was just enough to protect Medusa's giant body.

The [Boar] charged at the giant shield. This shield, transformed from the serpents, formed a temporary castle wall, blocking the the charge from Verethragna's servant.

CRASH!

A fierce sound of impact. The [Boar] was bounced back greatly by the bronze shield.

Nevertheless, the [Boar] landed splendidly on four legs without losing its balance. Kicking its hind legs against the ground, it prepared for a second clash.

"O woman who turneth into the fiendish snake, release thine eyes."

Godou gasped after hearing Pallas Athena's command.

The rectangular shield, whose surface depicted the appearance of the Gorgon Medusa—Her eyes were glowing!

"She's trying to turn you into stone! Hang in there!"

Godou hastily poured magic power into the [Boar]'s giant pitch-black body.

ROOOOAAAAR! The [Boar]'s magic power was raised to the max, resisting the demonic powers released by the shield of Medusa.

—Cursed optical power, capable of rendering everything within its gaze into stone.

Unable to defend completely, the [Boar]'s right front leg and left hind leg were turned into stone.

However, the rest of its body was still mobile. Without hesitation, the [Boar] charged at Pallas Athena again, trying to use its giant sharp tusks to send her flying.

Blocking in front of the [Boar] was still the shield of Medusa, hovering before the goddess.

Another sound of impact. This time, Pallas Athena did not just use the shield for defense. Extending a giant scythe from behind the shield, she slashed the [Boar]'s body!

ROOOOOOAAAAAAR!?

The [Boar] groaned in pain.

Nevertheless, Verethragna's fifth incarnation continued to emit howling shockwaves relentlessly, again and again, charging and colliding again and again, trying to crush its prey. Suffering odds of two against one from the attacks of Pallas Athena and Medusa, the [Boar] would probably get vanquished by the scythe or the petrification magic at the slightest opening.

...While observing this round of attack and defense, Godou summoned Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi into his right hand.

He had a certain premonition that given his opponent was Athena, she was not going to ignore him on the side—Precisely as mortal enemies sharing the same ill fate, such a premonition arose.

His hunch proved to be correct.

By the time he noticed, the sun had set completely. The curtain of night had already descended.

Lurking in this darkness, the enemy arrived. This was no metaphor. For Pallas Athena who possessed divinity as a goddess of darkness, melding into the darkness was as effortless as breathing.

A shadow silently crept behind Godou and swung the grim reaper's scythe.

Through minute movements in the air as well as a godslayer's sharp instinct towards life threatening crises, Godou sensed this attack, turning around and swinging Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi with both hands.

A violent clash between the scythe swung out of darkness and the ancient Japanese divine sword—

"You came as expected, huh!?"

"Fufufufu! 'Twould be an affront to the war goddess' dignity if one failed to issue a direct greeting to the enemy of one's past life. Thou hast waited long, Kusanagi Godou!"

While the sacred scythe and the divine blade clashed violently, the two of them conversed quietly.

Appearing behind Godou's back was Pallas Athena in the form of a pubescent girl. Bearing the identical face and body of the original Athena, she was using both hands to swing a long scythe even taller than herself.

This was Godou's closest confrontation with her ever since their reunion at Sardinia.

Staring into the beautiful face of the Divine Ancestor who had turned into a goddess again, he said:

"What are you thinking by suddenly using a self-sacrificing trump card? What are you trying to do?"

"'Tis simple, verily. Because there is no other means."

While they were conversing, the clash continued.

Murmuring softly, Pallas Athena raised the scythe forcefully with both hands.

"One shall personally defeat thee then slay the 'King of the End.'
"

"Slay the 'King of the End'—What are you talking about?"

Her unexpected statement made Godou frown.

The Divine Ancestor swung the underworld deity's scythe at Godou's face. This mighty force could not possibly be generated from a pubescent girl's slender arms—It was enough to send an automobile flying with one hand.

Such arm strength must have been brought forth through divine power.

However, Godou easily deflected the scythe.

He was using Verethragna's second incarnation, the [Bull], which provided monstrous strength that could only be used against an enemy possessing powerful might far beyond that of humans. At the same time, Godou sustained the [Boar], using two incarnations in parallel.

This strain was causing him an intense headache.

While clashing blades with Pallas Athena, Godou secretly gritted his teeth.

"You're saying you intend to fight the 'King of the End'!?"

"One is definitely charged with the destiny of serving that man... Yet one hath contemplated sufficiently. Thou mentionedst this before. Divine Ancestors are goddesses whose essence was absorbed by the Divine Sword of Salvation."

The girl, who looked identical to Athena, showed eyes calmly burning with the flames of fury. She spoke softly:

"Well then—One couldeth consider that man to be mine enemy, yes?"

"!"

"The mission must be accomplished, indeed, yet vengeance must also be exacted for one's death."

Listening to this point, Godou yelled for he had realized her intent:

"You want to defeat me and the 'King of the End' together!?"

"How clever, Kusanagi Godou. Simply by taking on the form of the serpentine dragon, one retrieveth a goddess' power and couldeth shake the soul of that man—the 'King of the End' bearing

the karma of dragonslaying. Verily two birds with one stone. His slumber shall consequently grow lighter."

Athena used to be Kusanagi Godou's great rival, a warrior prouder than anyone.

Knowing this fact, Godou had thought over this before. Although she had become a Divine Ancestor, to be serving the " King of the End" who was akin to her enemy... That did not *seem like her style*.

To think I'd misunderstand her intentions, what a fool I am—Godou laughed.

Easily forsaking her own life to turn it into a weapon. All this was for upholding her pride. Seeing this course of action living up to Athena's identity, he found it exhilarating.

"Then asking that wind god to leave—"

"Naturally, 'tis to bring about the return of the 'King of the End.' Thou shalt watch properly, Kusanagi Godou. One shall beat thee into submission then defeat the chosen hero as well!"

"Stop joking around! I'll stop you before you succeed!"

There was already no point in continuing the battle. The two of them jumped back simultaneously.

Ten-odd meters away on the beach, the [Boar] was fighting courageously against the Medusa-formed Pallas Athena and her shield. Victory was yet to be decided—

In front of the pubescent-formed Pallas Athena, Godou adjusted his grip on Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

"Where did the Wind King go?"

Opening her shut eyes, Liliana asked in a quiet voice.

The current location was a pier some distance away from the beach where Pallas Athena was meeting Kusanagi Godou in battle.

Apart from her, Erica, Yuri and Amakasu were also present. They were observing the battle between goddess and Devil King from afar. After the Wind King suddenly appeared and flew into the sky, Liliana instantly used her prided [Witch's Eye].

She originally wanted to use this witchcraft, capable of projecting one's vision into the distance, to track down the whereabouts of the war god flying through the sky—

"He flew somewhere too high to follow. This speed and altitude is such that even the [Witch's Eye] cannot keep up..."

"Although I don't really think it's possible, he wouldn't be thinking of flying into space, would he?"

Just as Erica was feeling puzzled, Yuri suddenly showed an stunned expression.

"Ah—floating island... The land where the sacred sword sleeps... Ahhh!"

Looking up into the sky, the Hime-Miko tracked the Wind King with her eyes.

While murmuring as though speaking in a dream, she was shaken by the revelation. It was as though she felt surprised from the bottom of her heart towards the hint obtained through spirit vision.

"I cannot believe that a floating island could exist in such a place ..."

"Floating island? Are you talking about that legend, Yuri?" asked Ena, the other Hime-Miko and wielder of Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

"Speaking of the Divine Sword of Salvation and the legend of where the 'King of the End' sleeps. If memory serves correctly, ' Queen Oto Tachibana-Hime, jumped into the sea with sword embosomed. Sea currents carried her sword to a location of neither land nor sea, whence a floating island subsequently appeared,' isn't that right?"

"Yes, indeed..."

Trembling, Yuri pointed at the sky.

Only very few clouds were floating in the clear night sky. The half moon was slowly rising in midair. The winter night's countless stars were shining brightly.

Ena first went "Hmm...?", lost in thought for a while before reaching a revelation.

"Floating island... An island which floats. A place of neither land nor sea, so that's—!?"

"The sky. An island floating somewhere in the sky. So it really turned out to be this kind of situation."

Reaching the same conclusion, Erica sighed.

"Lady Guinevere and Sir Lancelot were unable to find it no matter how they searched land and sea, right? They were totally in the wrong direction."

"An island in the sky... Oh my, that's really going along the pace of Gulliver's Travels and a certain famous animated film."

Amakasu shook his head while muttering, confounded.

Then to convey important information to her companions, Yuri regained composure from her state of shock and said frantically:

"I-I shall go confirm what has happened on the floating island. As for Godou-san, I am counting on everyone!"

Clad in a miko outfit, Yuri's body gave off white light.

This was the radiance from activating the spirit power she had acquired after her inborn spirit vision—psychic sensing.

Part 3

Higher than the clouds. A place above the atmosphere.

This was an extremely high altitude in the sky that people called a satellite orbit. A domain in space, beyond the atmosphere.

Looking down from there, the view was like a map spreading out with the islands of Japan in the center.

Even as a heavenly child of the sky, the Wind King seldom came to such high places.

Depending on sunlight conditions, this place could turn into either a land of frost or a realm of scorching heat. An extremely harsh environment. However, protected by divine authority, he floated through the air lightly while he soared.

Floating in front of his gaze was a small patch of land.

Like many small islands on the Pacific Ocean, it had hills and plains. However, this island did not contain life such as plants. It was an island composed only of soil and rocks.

Stabbed in the center of the island was a sword of steel.

This mighty sword had a blade of roughly 100cm in length. The sword was double-edged and thick like a hatchet's blade in

construction. However, the entire steel sword was quite decrepit, covered in rust.

The Divine Sword of Salvation. This was the personal sword belonging to the hero of Devil King extermination, also the strongest of steel.

Then the Wind King poured divine power into the medallion. This was the divine artifact for employing the three sword-related heroes, the [Arrowhead's Discus].

The Discus glowed immediately.

Appearing out of intense blazing white flames was the man with the handsome face, Perseus.

Furthermore, sitting astride a winged horse, he was the very image of a dazzling handsome man.

Next, out surged a crimson pillar of fire, which then took on the form of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong. The peerless monkey king was riding a small golden cloud.

Finally, lightning shot out, turning into the figure of Lancelot du Lac.

This female knight was also an Amazonian queen. Lance in hand, she was riding a white horse flying through the sky.

Including the Wind King, gathered in front of the Divine Sword of Salvation was a total of four gods possessing the sword attribute .

"Hey there, everyone."

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven was the first to speak.

"Before we begin our quest, I've got a suggestion. It's truly a lucky occasion for four magnificent heroes to be gathered together. But it does mean we have too many leaders, so to prevent things from getting out of hand..."

It was like he wanted to have a casual chat on the extremely high altitude of a satellite orbit.

As expected of the monkey king who flew freely wherever he pleased. However, the subject of the conversation was far too deplorable.

"Why not let me, Great Sage Sun, be the great general and grand marshal, to serve as the eldest brother, and you guys can provide me with full support? How 'bout that?"

"Although I don't mind discussing the topic of electing a leader.."

While seated on his winged horse's saddle, Perseus frowned.

"I don't believe there is any need to leave this position to you. Rather, someone possessing kingly accomplishments and a magnificent array of myths, such as Perseus or Mithras for example, would be more suitable. That being said, I am both of them, incidentally..."

"If a king's pride is at stake, I hope you won't forget the Handsome Monkey King of the Fruit and Flower Mountain's Water Curtain Cave. Besides..."

The Great Sage scoffed with pride.

"I'm also renowned as the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. If we're deciding based on personal virtue and accomplishments, this old Sun here, peerless across heaven and earth, is the best choice..."

"According to legend, whether the Handsome Monkey King or being equal to heaven, both were merely self-proclaimed on your part."

"Yes, it's self-proclaimed. But in modern times, all citizens of the world have recognized it."

"How suspicious. At least back in the ancient Greco-Roman era of my knowledge, I have never heard of such notions."

"No no no no. You've gone too far now. I must issue a rebuttal for the sake of my honor."

"Great Sage, Perseus, gentlemen."

Lancelot interrupted, her beautiful face clouded with worry.

"This type of fruitless discussion would be nothing more than a waste of time. One shall hereby take on the leader's role as the Amazonian queen as well as the superbly renowned Lancelot du Lac. Each of you may apply yourselves with utmost dedication as knights to serve the queen. Gentlemen, would that be agreeable?"

"Agreeable, not... Rather, I can't believe what a shameless woman you are despite having such a cute face."

"Although I don't dislike this sort of bronco, I still believe I am the one most suited to be king, do you all agree?"

The great heroes of exalted renown were having a completely futile dispute.

At this moment, an acute metallic sound was heard. The three heroes turned their heads to see that the Wind King had flicked his finger against the Discus to make the sound.

"..."

The war god with the concealed identity expressed his feelings of disapproval through his gaze from behind the mask.

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven shrugged in response to that gaze.

"There's no need to hide your voice, y'know? I've already seen through your identity."

"Hoh."

Perseus laughed and openly expressed his impressed feelings.

"In that case, Lord Monkey, perhaps I, Perseus, might have misjudged you as a man. I still have yet to discern that wind god's true identity. Your eyes truly bear outstanding wisdom."

"It's the smell, the smell. One whiff of his odor and I figured it out immediately."

The Great Sage sniffed through his monkey nostrils.

He was visibly pleased after Perseus praised him despite their dispute.

Then the three heroes' gazes gathered on the Wind King, waiting for him to speak. However, the mysterious war god of steel and wind simply extended an index finger, pointing to the divine sword stabbed in the center of the floating island.

"What a stingy dude."

Despite complaining, the Great Sage still steered his cloud towards the floating island.

Perseus shrugged whereas Lancelot simply followed the king of monkeys nonchalantly. The Wind King also flew leisurely in the rear.

There was not the slightest greenery on the floating island. It was like a barren hill with only soil and rock.

They landed on its surface, roughly the size of a baseball field. Apart from the Wind King, the rest all traveled without walking by either riding their beloved steed or cloud. With that, the four heroes arrived before the rust-speckled divine sword.

"Well then... Let's begin."

The Great Sage muttered.

Just prior to arriving at Japan, Pallas Athena had summoned the three heroes to give them certain orders which were meant to be executed as soon as the time was right.

Gathered at this place were sword gods—Warriors carrying the attribute of "dragon and serpent slaying."

As a result, everyone noticed. Several hundred kilometers down below their location, Pallas Athena had released the seal of dragons and snakes to launch a frenzied offensive.

As queens and former deities, dragons and serpents were precisely the monsters which these mother earth goddesses manifested into.

For heroes of steel, they were targets to be vanquished since the age of the myths. Sensing her aura, the four heroes felt their bodies and minds surge with power in preparation for combat.

"Hey you, Divine Sword of Salvation."

The Great Sage spoke to the rust-speckled steel sword that had lost its splendor of days past.

Not only was he a monkey and a hero, but he was also a user of the immortal arts with vast and varied powers—In other words, a god of magic. Hence, he was going to preside over the *revival ritual* as well.

The other warrior heroes took a step back, observing from behind the monkey king.

"You sleepyhead must have sensed the presence of our long-time enemy, the serpent, haven't you? The hero's destiny engraved on the bottom of your soul should have made your body boil with hot blood, hasn't it?"

The Great Sage sounded like he was chatting with an old friend.

No answer. However, the rusted divine sword's blade began to shake.

Storm clouds were suddenly gathering in the lower realm far below with thunder and lightning. From this vantage point on a satellite orbit, even the sea of clouds looked like nothing more than distant specks in the world below.

"And that's not all. A number of contemptible godslayers have been born in the current era. There's the old Devil King who's like a ravenous wolf and the queen who shamelessly calls herself peerless under the sky. Then there's the witch with no talents other than bringing calamity to the world. Plus four other youngsters—A total of seven godslayers, extolling the present era as their springtime..."

While he was speaking softly, a sphere of light appeared above the Great Sage's head.

The sphere was as big as a clenched fist. After manifesting, it ascended rapidly, shining above the group of heroes like a miniature sun.

"With these godslayers gathered upon the earth, this would be the so-called end times. Now is the time that could be considered the end of the world."

The rapidly rising sphere of light suddenly expanded.

Within the blink of an eye, its diameter surpassed a hundred meters—roughly the size of the floating island that had kept the divine sword concealed for a millennium. Furthermore, this giant ball of light was suddenly releasing lightning, giving off electrical sparks all over the place.

"To slice apart the darkness of the end times, to eradicate the godslaying Devil Kings, we hereby pray for the sword's rebirth. O most exalted sword of swords, blade of blades. Thou art the blade of Devil King extermination. Thou art the white light of salvation. Thou art the one born to kill all of the Rakshasa!"

The Great Sage pointed his furry index finger up at the sky.

Then he slowly lowered his finger to point directly at the divine sword. A moment later, the ball of light overhead, which kept discharging electricity, produced a continuous stream of thunder and lightning.

Rumble—!

Rumble—!

Rumble—!

Falling lightning and thunderous roars repeated over a hundred times. The flashing light and energy were all absorbed by the Divine Sword of Salvation.

Not only was it not blown away from the force but it also did not move the slightest from its position.

Confronted with this divine sword that remained unfazed to a slightly annoying degree, the Great Sage invoked the final summons.

"O sacred king manifesting at era's end, I hereby beseech thee to descend!"

This was both a prayer and a petition, as well as spell words imbued with power.

The episode of falling thunder and lightning finally ended—The Divine Sword of Salvation also recovered its shine.

Having stood for over a thousand years, originally decrepit and all covered with rust, the 100cm blade was infused with blindingly bright platinum radiance, shining with sacred glory and splendor.

Seeing this light, someone other than the Great Sage Equaling Heaven finally spoke.

"O king—O 'King of the End.' Although it is most unbelievable."

It was Lancelot. While her honey-colored hair fluttered in the wind, the Amazonian deity spoke:

"Have you forgotten this knight's visage?"

"No..."

A hero suddenly manifested next to the divine sword.

Long pale hair. A handsome man featuring a young face with exquisite features.

However, etched upon his handsome, prim and proper face like rust was a sense of irrecoverable weariness and battle-hardened ferocity. He was wearing a simple blue tunic with pants of the same color and a cape of pure white on top.

Slowly, as though touching something repulsive, he gripped the hilt of the divine sword.

"Of course I remember you, knight of the lancea. To think the day of our reunion would arrive... Destiny is truly difficult to predict."

"What a nostalgic name. Lancelot du Lac is currently this knight's name."

"Is that so? I see you have finally gained a new name."

A refreshing smile surfaced on the aristocrat's weary and handsome face.

In that instant, the rust-like expression was put away, replaced by elegant airs as befitted one of highborn nobility. This was how he expressed his joy towards the extraordinary fate binding him with Lancelot.

However, this change soon ended. The "King of the End" withdrew his smile.

"Hello to you, Hero of Salvation."

The Great Sage spoke in a giggling manner.

"It's said in the human realm that those who arrive late to the banquet must gulp down three drinks as punishment. You should descend upon the land like thunder to greet that nation's godslayer , how 'bout that?"

"..."

The monkey king continued to talk enthusiastically to the completely nonchalant aristocrat.

"Naturally, it feels quite a shame to me as a warrior to relinquish the vanguard position to someone else, but seeing as I owe my resurrection to you, I'll endure without making a fuss—"

"Not necessary."

The 'King of the End' shook his head, giving a curt answer to the chattering resurrected hero.

"The way I see it, making such a move immediately after my return would be an act of imprudence."

"Hah."

"Great Sage Equaling Heaven, although the value of your counsel may be worth its weight in gold... Let us eschew that for now."

"I see."

Finding his enthusiasm met with instant rejection, the Great Sage whispered to Perseus beside him in hopes of eliciting someone else's reaction.

"...I didn't expect him to be so lacking in hot-bloodedness."

"...Despite being rumored to be the man who exterminated all godslayers."

The Greco-Roman hero scrutinized the 'King of the End' while showing a smile of interest.

"On the other hand, recklessly rushing headlong into battle would be rather boorish. I find the Savior's thoughts understandable. Well then, shall we take a break for now?"

"Yes, thank you."

Answering Perseus in the affirmative, the "King of the End" focused his gaze on a certain person standing in the back.

The Wind King whose true identity was hidden behind cloth and a mask. This war god, who had been serving the Devil King exterminating hero even before the era of ancient Gaul, silently stepped up and presented the [Arrowhead's Discus].

The master shook his head silently and communicated with his eyes.

It was as though he were saying "you hold onto it for now." The masked subordinate nodded in acknowledgement and stepped back again.

This communication took place between master and subordinate linked by deep bonds, requiring no speech to convey their thoughts.

Then the Great Sage and Perseus turned into particles of light which were sucked into the medallion.

Their revival stemmed from the authority of the 'King of the End,' which mean that they must merge with the [Arrowhead's Discus] regularly to recuperate in order to sustain their manifestations.

The Wind King also took a leap.

With that, he turned into wind and left his master, leaving only Lancelot du Lac behind—

"You have grown weary of battle indeed."

The female knight's quiet words conveyed sorrow while pity inhabited her eyes.

Listening quietly, the 'King of the End' showed a weary smile and nodded to the ally whom he was meeting after a separation of fifteen hundred years.

Then Lancelot turned into light too and was sucked into the [Arrowhead's Discus].

Left on his own, the 'King of the End' took up the Divine Sword of Salvation once more. On his back was a scabbard for carrying this mighty sword whose blade measured 100cm long.

Putting the divine sword away, the Devil King exterminating hero sighed.

"What now?"

Suddenly, the floating island's surface was struck by violent shaking.

Not just once but continuous shaking. A small island flying on a satellite orbit could not possibly have an earthquake. The "King of the End' noticed instantly.

"Falling...?"

Someone was summoning the floating island to the ground—making the floating island fall. This was shaking the entire island.

Noticing the anomaly in the sky, Godou frowned.

"...?"

While clashing Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's blade with Athena's long-shafted scythe, he was also releasing magic power to the [Boar].

Without warning, the winter night sky was filled with storm clouds and the continuous roaring of thunder.

Suddenly, a flash of white—no, platinum-colored—lightning sliced through the darkness.

"The return is finally accomplished, yes?"

Pallas Athena spoke softly.

"So you mean the 'King of the End' finally awakened!?"

Godou questioned the young Divine Ancestor who was overcome with emotions.

Pallas Athena did not answer but her eyes shone with seductive and ominous light. Her eyes glowed red. Godou felt a sense of petrification throughout his entire body. The Eyes of Medusa!

"Guh...!"

To resist the evil eyes of petrification, Godou further increased the magic power permeating his entire body.

Not only was he using Ama no Murakumo and the two incarnations of the [Boar] and the [Bull] simultaneously, but he must also squeeze out more magic power in desperation, just barely managing to defend.

His lower body only turned into stone for an instant before returning to flesh immediately.

"True to the name of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven... He hath completed the revival sooner than expected. In that case, one's duel against thee must be adjourned for now. One must now proceed to the next stage of preparations."

The young Pallas Athena smiled discreetly and issued a lengthy howl towards the sky.

The Pallas Athena in the distance—engaged in a melee battle with the [Boar] in the form of a giant Medusa—sprouted a pair of black wings from her back. With a forceful flap of her wings, she floated up in the sky.

ROOOOOOAAAAAR!?

The wingless [Boar] howled with displeasure at the enemy that had suddenly flown into the air. However, with its right front leg and left hind leg turned into stone, the [Boar] was unable to jump in pursuit of its opponent.

Holding the scythe, the petite snake goddess also sprouted wings on her back and soared into the sky.

The two Pallas Athenas, one big and one small, finally met side by side in the air.

" "O gods of the sky with Father Zeus first and foremost, one hereby draweth all creation back to the motherland with mine authority of an earth mother goddess. Ye shall not obstruct one's will!" "

The two Pallas Athenas, one big and one small, chanted spell words simultaneously.

Then—A meteor crashed down from the dark sky blotted by storm clouds.

No, this was no meteor. From the sky above Tokyo Bay, a *small island* was crashing down on this Minamibousou region that included Kisarazu.

"Is this the floating island...?"

Godou realized it. Pallas Athena's authority had summoned this island to the ground!

"Can you release *that*!?"

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!

Responding to his frantic command, the [Boar] unleashed a supersonic howl at maximum power towards the two Pallas Athenas.

But the attack did not work. The supersonic pulse and shockwave was supposed to pulverize the two Pallas Athenas in the air, big and small alike, but was blocked by the shield.

Using the bodies of divine beasts as its material, the shield with Medusa's face carved on it—The divine shield, Aegis.

It was the defensive armament that had been hovering next to the large Pallas Athena, protecting her. This time, it also served as the protective barrier for the two goddesses, shattering into fragments on its master's behalf.

" "Go, go over to the 'King of the End'!" "

The two Pallas Athenas shouted together and suddenly vanished.

They had probably gone to pursue the "King of the End" and the floating island that had fallen somewhere in the Bousou Peninsula. Godou could not leave those two alone. He must pursue no matter what!

"Kusanagi Godou!"

It was Liliana's voice. Looking back, he found the silver-haired knight hurrying over with the rest of his companions—Erica, Ena and Yuri.

"Leave it to me. I will take you to Pallas Athena."

"Flight magic, right? But I thought you can't use it if you don't know the destination?"

Godou asked Liliana who spoke first to make the offer.

Flying spells, exclusive to witches, were extremely convenient but had many limitations conversely. However...

"F-Fear not."

Arriving last and out of breath, Yuri spoke up.

The others had probably conserved their energy and were far from strained. But for the Hime-Miko who lacked physical stamina , this was quite intense exertion already.

"I have already used the spirit power of psychic sensing to capture the location where the floating island crash landed. There should be no problem once I transmit the imagery to Liliana-san..."

Although still trying to catch her breath, Yuri also offered to help.

Everyone was so reliable. Godou nodded and transmitted his thoughts to the [Boar], your help is no longer needed for now.

Dragging a pair of petrified legs, the [Boar] stared at the empty sky above the beach.

It was exuding an aura of raging frustration, having failed to destroy its target. But since the targeted prey had already vanished , the [Boar] had no choice but to disappear obediently.

Godou also returned Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi back to his right arm. He also released the [Bull]'s monstrous strength.

The strain from using concurrent incarnations finally vanished, leaving his body much relieved. Ena and Erica walked over to Godou's side.

"Hey, Your Majesty, do you still remember the revival of the ' King of the End' in Gaul?"

Ena suddenly brought this up.

"Back then, the goddess Artio offered her life as energy for the ' King of the End,' right? Just now, Erica-san and Ena were discussing—"

"Perhaps Pallas Athena might have the same intentions."

"But did you know she declared she'll defeat the 'King of the End'?"

Godou scratched his head. However, Erica proposed a further hypothesis:

"Hmm. Then using this as a pretext to approach the 'King of the End,' she will launch a surprise attack—"

"...I see."

As the reincarnation of Athena, the goddess of war, she definitely might take this course of action.

Then another acquaintance's face surfaced in Godou's mind.

That of the aristocrat he had met in Gaul a thousand five hundred years ago. His taste for conflict was definitely not prolific and he did not enjoy unnecessary fighting. In the end, would he accept Pallas Athena's challenge?

The Devil King vanquishing hero versus the godslaying Devil King.

That hero and Godou were rivals destined for an inevitable duel .

Godou noticed that he held an unexpectedly favorable impression of the 'King of the End.' However, the important thing now was to track down Pallas Athena first.

Part 4

Although it crashed towards the ground like a shooting star, of course, the floating island was not actually a meteor.

What caused this descent was the authority belonging to Pallas Athena, having retrieved her divinity as a great mother goddess of the earth. Using the power to attract all creation to the earth—the manipulation of gravity—she pulled the "King of the End" together with the entire floating island to the Bousou Peninsula.

It was a place deep in the mountains of Minamibousou.

The floating island collided with a mountain ridge that was only covered sparsely by trees.

There was no impact or explosion like a real meteor crash. Holding tender affection for the land, the goddess' authority protected the mountains.

However, this protection did not extend to the floating island.

The floating island was shattered from the impact of the fall with fragments of rock, soil and sand scattering everywhere.

However, the "King of the End" did not meet the same fate as the floating island's. At two or three hundred meters above the ground, he took a light leap from a corner of the island, jumping into the air.

The "King of the End" had neither wings nor authorities of flight .

Nevertheless, he had acquired many techniques for surviving arduous predicaments.

"Those of you floating in various places of heaven and earth, please lend me your power."

Chanting spell words, he prayed for the protection of spirits.

At the same time, he did not forget to trace out a holy seal in the air using the index and middle fingers of his right hand. Hence, the spirits residing in the mountains, rivers and vegetation of this land all lent him their power.

Compared to heretic gods, they were all random spirits with meager powers.

Neither did they possess character or intellect sufficient to be called personalities.

But by gathering hundreds, thousands of their thoughts and spiritual powers, it could still serve as a driving force for enacting miracles accordingly. The protection of spirits gave support to the "King of the End" in the air, slowing down the rate of his descent.

This allowed him to land from hundreds of meters in the air without a single scratch.

"I offer my gratitude. Thanks to you all, my life was spared."

Landing on both feet, the "King of the End" offered thanks with sincerity.

Then he examined his surroundings. This was a mountain ridge covered sparsely with trees. Hence, visibility was wide and open. He could also sense the snake monster's approaching figure accompanied by murderous intent.

"Are you the one who brought about my return? And your name is?"

"Pallas Athena is one's name. How touching. To think one couldeth meet the hero whom generations of Divine Ancestors and Witch Queens had spent a millennium searching in vain..."

"Looks like you have released the seal of dragons and snakes..."

Having split into two bodies earlier, Pallas Athena was merged back into one again.

Her form was the giant goddess Medusa. With a magic bird's black wings sprouting out of her back, she had flown at low altitude along the mountain ridge to arrive here.

"In order to *kill thee*—the king manifesting at era's end, there is no other way. One's former power and authority is needed."

"To kill me... Is that so?"

Listening to Pallas Athena who made no effort to conceal her murderous intent, the "King of the End" nodded.

He did not ask for the reason. He simply lowered his gaze for an instant.

He understood better than anyone, precisely because of his position as the one who subjugated Divine Ancestors to do his bidding.

It would not be strange to harbor such thoughts if the proud spirit dating from her time as a goddess were to remain fairly intact after becoming a Divine Ancestor, carrying a personality with an extremely vigorous will to fight.

The aristocrat looked up and stared gallantly into the eyes of Pallas Athena.

"I understand that you regard me as your mortal enemy. Do you wish for a duel with me?"

"Naturally."

"Then I cannot refuse."

He answered immediately, confronting his culpability with a serious attitude.

Slowly, he drew the divine sword from his back—No, the "King of the End" did not do that. Instead, he took down the Divine Sword of Salvation in its scabbard and raised it towards the sky.

"Spirits of the local land. May I entrust this to your safekeeping for now?"

His request brought forth an answer. The divine sword in its scabbard floated into the sky, stopping after rising dozens of meters above the ground.

Seeing the "King of the End" let go of his weapon, Pallas Athena glared at him in anger.

"Thou shalt duel with one yet relinquish the divine sword?"

"Indeed. So long as I hold the divine sword, this definitely cannot be considered a fair duel."

The hero's eyes displayed neither pride nor pity.

Residing within them were pure feelings, only wishing to respond with sincerity to the opponent challenging him with her soul and dignity on the line.

"Pallas Athena, with your strong sense of pride, you appear to be a Divine Ancestor born from the Holy Grail—the divine artifact created by the goddess Gwenhwyfar."

The Devil King exterminating hero stared candidly into the goddess' eyes.

Gwenhwyfar was the great mother earth goddess who had served the "King of the End" together with the war god Lancelot, later reincarnating into Divine Ancestor Guinevere.

"Seeing as that is the case, I can still defeat you even without the Divine Sword of Salvation."

"...Hoh."

With wrath akin to raging flames, Pallas Athena stared at her enemy's handsome face.

But after hearing the hero's explanation, she smiled faintly. She approved of the nobility in his words.

Perhaps through the spiritual senses of a goddess of wisdom, she understood that he was likely speaking the truth.

"A duel with one's life and honor on the line must not be tainted the slightest. I am forsaking the divine sword's use out of respect with absolutely no intent to belittle your powers."

"One hath already understood thy thoughts. Nevertheless, is this meet?"

Smiling, Pallas Athena looked down at the "King of the End" with her mysterious gaze.

The eyes of the giant goddess in Medusa form flashed red. The evil eyes of petrification. Under this gaze. the "King of the End" was completely turned into stone below the waist together with his left hand.

"The hero of salvation deriveth power from the earth's essence, yet thou hast not absorbed any essence at all. Thou intendest to oppose one with such a body?"

"I have resolved myself already. I hope to decide our match here, will that be agreeable?"

Even with half his body turned into stone, the "King of the End" still spoke resolutely.

Just now, Kusanagi Godou had raised his magic power in an emergency to resist Pallas Athena's evil eyes. Failing even to do that, it seemed like the pale-haired aristocrat had yet to recover his condition.

In addition, he had even personally sealed away his trump card, the Divine Sword of Salvation—

Even so, the "King of the End" still confronted Pallas Athena squarely.

Pallas Athena did not hold back either. Blue-white flames spewed out from between Medusa's lips, flowing towards the hero who had half his body turned into stone.

"Guh—Ahhhhhhhh!"

Having taken the form of a serpentine dragon's, Pallas Athena was producing flames with firepower equaling a dragon's blazing breath.

Scorched by the conflagration, the "King of the End" screamed in pain. However, ten white orbs of light suddenly appeared in his surroundings and desperately tried to reduce the flames' temperature. Like the power protecting him from freefall, this was protection from the spirits.

During this strange battle to the death, Pallas Athena laughed heartily.

Meanwhile, the "King of the End" made a slightly wry smile while enduring the mighty flames. Rather than both sides giving up on the fight, this was a sign that they were reaching some kind of understanding—Just at this moment...

(....Ah... My revered brother—)

A weak voice was heard all of a sudden.

A flickering shadow suddenly appeared next to the divine sword floating in the air dozens of meters up, then started to swirl and contract, calling the "King of the End" at the same time.

(My revered brother, you are the savior king manifesting at era's end. The king of kings. The great hero with the most noble of

destinies. A tiger among men. Your glorious accomplishments have infinite splendor. The supreme hero. Bestowed upon you are the greatest blessings from the myriad gods!)

Lavished with these extraordinarily flowery words of praise, the "King of the End" was stunned.

Looking up from the blue flames, he stared straight at the Divine Sword of Salvation floating in the air above. At the same time, the shadow in midair that had called him "revered brother" was also gradually changing in form.

The lower body remained as a shadow spinning like a vortex while only the upper body turned into a pale-haired aristocrat—

His face was identical to that of the "King of the End." However, unlike his elder brother's pale complexion, his brown skin looked like it had been tanned under the sun.

The dark-skinned divine aristocrat, melded with the shadows, emitted a lengthy howl.

(Mere goddess of the earth, how dare you continue to insult my noble brother. Allow me to assist my brother in an act of impertinence!)

"Stop! Upon my position as elder brother, I forbid you to act. Do not interfere!"

However, the "King of the End," burning in blue flames, was not heeded.

Hovering in the air, the "younger brother" reached for the Divine Sword of Salvation with his right hand. Just as he was about to grip the hilt, Pallas Athena stopped him.

While discharging blazing flames from her mouth, she emitted red light from her eyes.

Taking on this gaze, the "younger brother" was devoured by flames just like the "King of the End."

"A mere subordinate god, thou darest to disrupt one's enjoyment of battle? Insufferable foolishness!"

(Guahhhhhhhhhh!?)

Scorched by the blue divine punishment, the younger brother screamed.

Pallas Athena glanced at his pained demeanor and murmured with a bored face:

"Hmph, one expected the Wind King, but nay, 'twas thee. Thou art a minor character unworthy of mention. As the goddess of wisdom, one knoweth with but a single glance."

Pallas Athena had used a power corresponding to spirit vision of miko in the human realm.

"Thou art the subordinate god who hath always stood behind the hero of salvation, guarding him—In other words, his alter ego. Although thy loyalty towards thy duties is commendable... Thou art too boorish. Know thy place."

The conflagration of wrath instantly burned the "younger brother" to ash.

Not even bones remained near the divine sword floating in midair. Only burnt ash was scattered all around. However—This ash remained active.

"How now?" Pallas Athena frowned.

(Kukuku... A mere mother earth goddess, thinking you know everything...)

Deep laughter from the "younger brother" could be heard from the ash resulting from the wrathful conflagration.

(I was born from the shadow of my revered brother—the strongest of steel. Even if only a tiny part, I do possess the trait of indestructible resilience. Watch carefully!)

While roaring loudly, the ash took on the form of *a human arm*.

Then gripping the divine sword's hilt, it drew the sword out from its scabbard in one go. An instant after that, platinum-colored light thoroughly illuminated the whole surroundings.

"What is that light?"

Seeing this platinum-colored light appear, Godou was taken by surprise.

He was flying through the air while enveloped by blue light. In order to chase after Pallas Athena, he had asked Liliana to cast flight magic on him. Drastic events were taking place while he was still in mid-flight.

A pillar of light was suddenly erected from deep within the mountains on a ridge, releasing platinum-colored radiance.

This pillar of of light reached the storm clouds above. Although it was nighttime, the surrounding mountains and forest were still illuminated for a period of time.

After merely ten seconds, the pillar of light vanished.

"Kusanagi Godou, our destination is near the pillar of light."

"Then let's land nearby. I'll head over on my own while you meet up with Erica and the others to await the next move. I'm counting on you."

Godou gave orders to the silver-haired female knight who was flying with him.

Perhaps Pallas Athena was currently locked in a duel with the " King of the End." Refusing to let his companions face unnecessary risk, that was why Godou flew to the destination with Liliana alone.

After roughly three minutes, they finally landed at one end of the mountain ridge.

Liliana nodded to convey her thoughts to Godou, speaking with a knight's solemn face.

"May fortune favor you, also—"

As though about to whisper, she lowered her voice.

Godou approached her to listen more clearly. Then Liliana nonchalantly drew near Godou and kissed him lightly on the lips.

"!?"

"Th-This is a prayer for your good fortune. Should you return safe and sound... L-Let us continue in the usual manner."

"The usual manner!?"

"A-Are those passionate sessions between lips and tongues not the usual between you and us?"

Unable to offer a rebuttal, Godou was rendered dumbstruck.

Liliana gazed at Godou with eyes of tender affection for a moment before using flight magic again. Enveloped in blue light, she flew away.

Alone by himself again, Godou refreshed his mood and ran down the slope.

This mountain ridge was only sparsely covered by trees. Due to the excellent visibility, Godou instantly found his destination.

After running for two minutes, Godou arrived at his target.

Transformed into Medusa and enlarged in size, Pallas Athena was lying on the ground.

Stabbed in the ground next to her was the Divine Sword of Salvation. The last time Godou saw its splendorous form was during his trip to ancient times, but now it was radiant with sacred magnificence.

Pallas Athena was bleeding severely.

There were cuts on various parts of her Gorgon body—hundreds of locations.

Every wound was dark red with nonstop bleeding. The ground beneath her was dyed by an ominous shade of red.

The "King of the End" was standing on the side in solitude.

Looking down at the fallen Pallas Athena sorrowfully, he shook his head with beleaguered thoughts.

However, the goddess remained motionless, collapsed on the ground, bleeding profusely. What on earth had happened?

While Godou was feeling surprised, the "King of the End" turned his head back.

He looked at Godou in surprise but soon regained composure.

"If memory serves me correctly—I have met you before. Yes. No less than fifteen hundred years or so ago. I have never seen you again in the battles since, which I found rather unusual."

The "King of the End" remembered Kusanagi Godou clearly.

Feeling a strangely emotional response to this fact, the Devil King exterminating hero finally looked squarely into Godou's eyes.

This was the moment when god and Devil King faced off again after a separation in time and space over fifteen hundred years.

Chapter 3 - Awakening

Part 1

"Back then, there were two other godslayers apart from you. In the end, the battle finished before I could meet them..."

Feeling perplexed, the "King of the End" muttered.

Then immediately, he nodded as though going "I see now."

"The three of you had traveled through time. Through a deity of travel or a fairy of some land, you traversed to the distant past from this era—"

"That's roughly what happened. I'm glad you understand, since it saves me the effort of unnecessary explanations."

Godou answered while thinking to himself.

An unbelievable conversation resumed seamlessly from fifteen hundred years ago. However, the incident actually felt like it was mere months ago from his perspective.

Still, casually chatting like this was not the answer going forward.

Godou looked at Pallas Athena, collapsed on the ground. That giant body of the Gorgon Medusa had already shrunk in size, transforming back to a pubescent girl.

Despite having released the seal using her life as the price, it was now impossible for her to sustain a serpentine dragon's body.

Pallas Athena had turned back into her girl form. The countless bleeding lacerations carved all over the Gorgon's body were gone, but conversely—A large hole had opened up in her chest.

The hole's location was precisely that of the heart. Unquestionably, a fatal wound.

There was no more bleeding. Instead, overflowing magic power was spilling out. The large volume of magic power was surging forth like a spring's source, starting to flow out from Pallas Athena's entire body.

Magic power normally lacked specific color. It was something colorless.

But right now, the magic power flowing from Pallas Athena's body glowed golden.

This golden magic power rose up high into the air, spreading overhead like a gas, turning the Minamibousou sky gold.

Under the sky that was colored by a golden aurora, Godou walked over to the collapsed Divine Ancestor.

"...You're in quite a sad state."

"...'Tis verily worthy of chagrin. *Due to the Holy Grail's activation*, one's power as a goddess was absorbed and taken. Forsooth, 'tis a rather dismal battle situation."

Despite mustering no more than a feeble voice, Pallas Athena still answered in a whisper.

Even at this stage, she still refused to admit defeat. The young and tiny girl was even moving her arms and legs desperately, slowly, slowly trying to stand up.

Truly living up to her identity as Athena's reincarnation, she was driven by indomitable will and noble-minded principles.

Witnessing this scene before his eyes, Godou smiled for an instant, but resumed a serious expression immediately.

"You said the Holy Grail activated?"

"Fifteen centuries prior, the goddess Gwenhwyfar created the Holy Grail as a vessel to contain the essence of mother earth goddesses such as one, to be stored as magic power. Furthermore, the previous Witch Queen Guinevere prayed to the Holy Grail on her dying breath, wishing for the new Witch Queen's birth."

Speaking of which, that really was the case. Godou remembered .

The cause of the mother earth goddess Athena's death was due to the Holy Grail sucking all of her life force away.

"In the end, taking the form of a Divine Ancestor, the Holy Grail became one."

"I see. You have this appearance because the majority of the magic power in the Holy Grail was sucked from Athena."

Realizing that, Godou knew it was just a simple mechanism.

While feelings were stirred deeply in Godou, Pallas Athena pushed herself up in front of him, displaying a courageous smile.

She still endured desperately even when inflicted with lethal wounds. What truly astounding mettle.

"It seemeth that whenever the hero unsheathed the Divine Sword of Salvation, the Holy Grail—namely, oneself—would offer all magic power to him. 'Tis intentional that Guinevere prevented one from learning of this fact..."

"Which is how you ended up in this state."

Godou now understood how Pallas Athena came to be lying at death's door.

Meanwhile, the "King of the End" was standing silently, some distance away. The Divine Sword of Salvation was stabbed upright on the ground in front of him. Illuminated by the sacred blade's brilliance, he was looking at Godou and Pallas Athena with eyes of determination.

Nevertheless, slight weariness and chagrin could be seen in the hero's gaze.

Godou felt a sense of dissonance. The "King of the End" did not look like a hero boasting of victory at all. Instead, he seemed to be enduring a sense of emptiness from an unsatisfactory victory.

"It mattereth not, but..."

Noticing Godou's doubts, Pallas Athena made a slight smile of wryness.

"Only one standing from his position could hope to openly confront the hero's conduct as it is... Do not begrudge his attitude towards battle. Putting that aside..."

Pallas Athena tried hard to move her right leg, lifting her knee.

She wanted to stand up, but evidently had little remaining strength. Only her entire body trembled. Even so, the girl inheriting Athena's indomitable spirit continued to declare boldly.

"Despite these grievous wounds, victory is as yet undecided. Depart, Kusanagi Godou. Interfere not in one's duel against the ' King of the End'—Guh!"

Pallas Athena spat out fresh blood along with her words.

Her knees also bended, causing her to fall on the ground again. In spite of that, the silver-haired Divine Ancestor still blazed with fighting spirit in her eyes, weaving words of valor through her red lips, stained with blood.

"Fufufu. Or perhaps, thou wishest to attack one together with the hero?"

"...No."

Godou stepped between the dying Divine Ancestor and the pale-haired aristocrat.

He even shielded Pallas Athena behind his back, turning to face off squarely against the "King of the End."

"No matter what, that guy's obviously the strongest here. Naturally, the most important thing right now is for me to assist you in settling your match against that man."

"..."

Pallas Athena was not supposed to have Athena's memories.

Considering her haughty attitude, Godou felt that it would be hard for her to approve this suggestion. However, the dying Divine Ancestor smiled generously instead.

"If 'tis for such a reason, 'twould not be disagreeable to join forces in facing a common enemy. A relationship of aligned interests..."

She whispered with her bloodstained lips.

Even without memories, was it engraved somewhere in the depths of her soul that they had shared the same boat as bitter enemies at one point in the past?

In any case, no different from the battle against Lancelot last time, Kusanagi Godou and Pallas Athena were going to cooperate in opposition against the "King of the End."

Naturally, the dying former goddess did not amount to any significant combat potential.

However, with a godslayer joining his mortal enemy to face off against the strongest hero, it was as though time had rewound back to the moment of their farewell several months prior.

Meanwhile, seeing the torturous and mysterious intertwined destinies between them—

"Helping the weak and taking down the strong... How chivalrous, Kusanagi Godou."

The pale-haired aristocrat voiced Godou's name for the first time after fifteen centuries.

He was also smiling slightly. It was akin to a smile appropriate for the face of a traveler making a brief stop, feeling pity for a tiny flower on the roadside.

Or perhaps, the face of a man who temporarily forgot the weariness of wandering.

"I am most pleased to see a man among the godslayers who can exhibit chivalry even towards the gods. Be that as it may, I must apologize."

Godou entered a stance. This guy was the same as in the past. Whenever he was about to bring forth great power, the "King of the End" always apologized!

"I have met defeat twice by your hand in the ancient past. Nevertheless, having obtained a mother earth goddess' life through the Holy Grail... I am no longer the one you know."

"Relax. I know that already."

Godou glanced into the sky.

The dark night sky was shining with golden radiance.

This was the golden magic power flowing out of Pallas Athena, the Holy Grail. Next, all the light filling the sky descended towards the "King of the End," poured completely into his body.

The result—An astounding amount of magic power currently filled the entire body of the "King of the End."

Back when he awakened in ancient Gaul, he seemed to be in an abnormal state.

But this time, having absorbed the Holy Grail's life force—namely, Pallas Athena's—the hero finally recovered his peak condition.

Godou licked his lips and stared sharply at the "King of the End ."

"However, this is still better than when the great ritual of the covenant was invoked in Gaul. I can deal with this."

Godou strengthened his tone of voice for his answer, partially as encouragement for himself.

The explosive increase in magic power when facing off against multiple Campiones, to the point of being able to fight every opponent together—

This was probably the great ritual of the covenant. In the past, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven had also used the spell of Devil King extermination.

But right now, Godou was the only godslayer present.

Logically speaking, that kind of absurd power up should not be available here. In spite of that...

"My apologies, but I have already recovered my full power due to obtaining the essence offered by the Holy Grail. Consequently, the great ritual of the covenant can be used naturally like this..."

What!? Just as the unexpected confession rendered Godou in shock...

He saw. The golden light filling the sky suddenly vanished. Instead, the "King of the End" was glowing golden from his entire body.

At the same time, his magic power—It rose dramatically.

Instantly, he reached the same level of magic power as the time when the Great Sage Equaling Heaven was battling against Kusanagi Godou, Luo Cuilian and John Pluto Smith.

Despite the fact that Kusanagi Godou was the only Campione present.

Furthermore, the increase in magic power did not stop there. If a standard [Heretic God]'s magic power was considered ten, then after using the great ritual of the covenant, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven would have magic power comparable to thirty or forty on the same scale. However, the magic power of the "King of the End" had surpassed seventy, eighty, ninety, even reaching a hundred—

Dumbstruck, Godou muttered:

"No way..."

None of the gods he had ever fought were weak.

Having said that, the "King of the End" now possessed massive magic power more than all of them combined, his body surrounded by glorious golden radiance.

"O Divine Sword of Salvation, hereby show your true form to the world."

The "King of the End" spoke quietly to his usual sword, stabbed upright in front of him.

Then a giant magic circle manifested overhead in the shape of a square.

Its side length was roughly ten meters. The square-shaped magic circle was subdivided into a grid of smaller cells, each depicting a weapon.

If one were to count them, there would probably be hundreds of weapons and armaments.

Most numerous were "arrows." In addition, there were swords, blades, bows, spears, axes, shields, cudgels, glaives, halberds, morningstars, ring-shaped objects, brick-like blocks, etc, even things that could not be called weapons.

Godou was reminded of a "mandala."

Meaning "circle" in Sanskrit, a spiritual and ritual symbol in oriental magic depicting dozens or hundreds of deities and buddhas. This was a mandala composed primarily from countless weapons replacing the deities and buddhas.

"Finally complete, the great ritual of the covenant. The ultimate sword for exterminating all Devil Kings..."

Pallas Athena whispered.

Godou turned his gaze to her in surprise. Covered in blood, the Divine Ancestor spoke solemnly.

"Kusanagi Godou. Thou shouldst avoid the mistake of comparing this to the Great Sage Equaling Heaven's imitation. The true exterminator of Devil Kings becometh more powerful in accordance to the number of enemies at hand..."

So it really was as he suspected? Godou nodded. He had already figured it out somewhat.

"At the present, his power hath increased in accordance to the number of Devil Kings walking the earth. The godslayers of the present generation number seven in total... The 'King of the End' has already grown to having power corresponding to this head count."

"Indeed."

The hero nodded and concurred with the Divine Ancestor.

Without any intention of bragging about his power, he was speaking in a tone of voice so indifferent it was almost business-like.

"When I descended upon the world in the past, I was bestowed countless heavenly weapons as gifts every time I finished my mission of Devil King extermination. The Divine Sword of Salvation is the form that unites them all. Consequently, this could be considered its true appearance."

"Man, there should be limits to the number of weapons you can have..."

Godou was greatly shocked. The legendary hero had received more than just a sacred sword as a gift. The true identity of the lightning descending from the Divine Sword of Salvation was a massive number of weapons. Godou had already discovered this fact in ancient Gaul. However, he never knew that these were unbelievably the heavenly weapons bestowed by the gods.

This was a shocking fact, more frightening than any other.

Personally experiencing the reason why the assertion was made in the past that he "absolutely cannot defeat that man," Godou trembled greatly. Furthermore, just as he was gradually about to be overwhelmed by the powerful enemy—In that very instant...

He heard a pleasant voice akin to heavenly music.

"Foolish little brother. Is there any need for fear?"

Startled, Godou turned his gaze to the voice's owner.

A woman was slowly walking over to him. Her pace was calm and confident, unhurried, reminiscent of the carefree and endless flow of the majestic Yangtze River.

Matching the beauty of her voice, her face was so beautiful that the lovely court ladies dwelling in the heavenly palace of the moon would seem plain in comparison.

Pallas Athena, all covered in wounds, and the "King of the End" also stared at this transcendent beauty.

"Though the enemy may enjoy protection provided by the great ritual of the covenant, you too have your sworn elder sister, unique and supreme. Being the peerless sworn siblings that we are , how could there possibly exist a foe in this world whom we cannot handle?"

The gentle and soothing voice was reminiscent of a moon guitar's tone color.

Needless to say, the latest arrival was Kusanagi Godou's sworn sister, Luo Cuilian, of course.

Part 2

"Nee-san!"

"We meet again, little brother."

This reunion was taking place two months after their previous gathering in December last year.

On this evening, Luo Cuilian was dressed in Han Chinese clothing with an extremely long hem, showcasing style akin to a wandering celestial maiden under the moon. However, there were more pressing matters at hand than getting mesmerized by her beauty.

Godou brought up the biggest question.

"Why did you come here, Nee-san?"

"Roughly half a month prior at Mount Lu, I saw the augury of the 'white halo piercing the sun' in a vision."

"A white halo—Come again?"

Although Luo Cuilian was not a deity, her majesty was comparable to that of the gods.

Arriving by Godou's side, she cast her haughty gaze in sequence, at Pallas Athena, the "King of the End" and the Divine Sword Mandala that was drawn in the sky.

That gaze undoubtedly belonged to the eyes of an emperor, looking down at his subjects from atop his throne. A gaze of unparalleled supremacy.

"I have no reason to intervene if the only thing at stake were the rise and fall of humanity. However, monumental events concerning the gods, the four seas, heaven and earth would be a separate matter. Suspecting the vision of the 'white halo piercing the sun' to be an augury of such happenings, I thus departed on a journey to discern the truth."

"By journey, do you mean coming to Japan from China?"

"No. Turning into a giant bird to soar through the skies, turning into a dragon to swim across the seas, I toured various places to observe their conditions. During my journey, sensing that the East

China Sea was filled with unusual divine energies, I tried to trace its source, thus arriving at this land."

This description was very much in the demonic cult leader's style, exhibiting her total mastery of Daoist arts, a wanderer of fantastical realms far removed from the mundane world.

Godou smiled wryly. At least she probably hasn't gone to urban areas—It looked like her direct disciple's speculation was not necessarily correct.

"Then Nee-san, about these guys here—"

"Say no more. One can get a gist by questioning spirits and apparitions local to this mountain. The great hero of Devil King extermination—I have heard of his rumors several times in the past, however..."

Luo Cuilian finally turned to gaze squarely at the "King of the End."

"I never expected this day when I would confront him together with my little brother by my side."

"...I see. Your position is akin to the elder sister of Kusanagi Godou?"

Taking the beautiful Devil King's gaze head on, the pale-haired hero murmured quietly. In response, Luo Cuilian proudly puffed out her magnificent chest and declared sonorously:

"No mere elder sister. One should be addressed as the supreme elder sister at the very least."

"Indeed you are correct. Even though this is our first meeting, I can easily understand the greatness of the powers under your command. If it pleases you, may I inquire your name and title?"

"In that case, please engrave into your heart the name of Luo Cuilian, Leader of the Holy Cult of the Five Mountains."

"Understood. Your Highness Luo Hao. But regrettably, my name—"

"Do not feel obliged to introduce yourself. The true name of the king manifesting at era's end has been known as a famous mystery for the past millennium. It would be an excessive breach of tact if one were to insist on inquiring your name."

"Much appreciated. Allow me to thank you for your understanding."

Godou secretly felt impressed. To think that he was able to get along with Luo Cuilian, a difficult task even for fellow humans, and to even converse so naturally as well.

The "King of the End" was unexpectedly adept in social skills.

Meanwhile, the conversation between the two otherworldly figures continued.

"Seeing as you are a figure of such caliber, Your Highness Luo Hao, I am afraid you probably know this already—I am the warrior tasked with the destiny of exterminating Devil Kings. I have no choice but to defeat you and that Kusanagi Godou over there."

"Of course, it couldn't be clearer. I shall accept."

"That being the case, may I ask for a time?"

"A foolish question indeed. I am not so cowardly that I would choose any hour apart from the one at hand."

In response to Luo Cuilian's utterly haughty gaze cast down from above, the great hero politely bowed his head. "Much appreciated."

Then the two of them began to enter combat stances. The demonic cult leader presented her palms in an open-handed stance , looking as though she was about to exhibit her prided palm techniques any instant.

The "King of the End" did not reach for the divine sword in front of him.

Still with his iconic sword stabbed in the ground, he issued a declaration of war in a stern and dignified voice:

"Kusanagi Godou, it is my hope that you will join your elder sister so as to have a rematch with me. Given how I am now, I should be able to satisfy you more than in past battles."

"I don't care about the past. I wasn't unsatisfied at all!"

Grumbling against the other side's unnecessary concerns, Godou looked back at the Divine Ancestor.

During the unusual conversation between the hero and the demonic cult leader, she had kept silent with good reason.

Her life was on the very verge of ending. Panting painfully, staying conscious was all Pallas Athena could do.

If she were to fight in this state, the lightning of salvation would quickly strike her down—

(King, summon her to *this place*. Interesting things ought to be possible if her power was present.)

Residing in his right arm, the partner offered a suggestion.

Godou nodded immediately and summoned Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, meanwhile saying to Pallas Athena:

"Athena—Enter my sword here! This is the weapon you've conferred power to in the past!"

There was nothing wrong with this description. Godou deliberately called her by her former name.

Hence, the Divine Ancestor instantly recovered light in her eyes . Then releasing her young girl's form, she turned into a silver snake, measuring 50cm in length, and swiftly entered the divine sword.

Held in Godou's right hand, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi had a jet-black blade.

This was the steel sword that the ancient Japanese god Susanoo had found in the Eight-Forked Serpent's tail, a weapon whose origin was intimately tied to snakes. In addition, several months

earlier, the goddess Athena had also imparted the [Storm Bringer Technique] directly into Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi—

Precisely due to the effects of these prior causes, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was able to absorb the Divine Ancestor, who had taken the form of a silver snake, into itself.

Godou nodded. Deciding to leave the rest to his partner, he returned Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi back to his right arm again for now.

"Nee-san, that guy's greatest weapon is lightning. We have to guard against that first."

"Know your place as the younger brother, Godou. It is a hundred years too early for you to worry about me!"

"That's true, I guess. Then I take it back. Allow me to rely on you, Nee-san!"

The Divine Sword Mandala overhead was beginning to speed up.

Rising upwards rapidly and steadily, it ascended to roughly the same height as the sparse clouds floating in the night sky. Also, the Divine Sword Mandala also expanded in area at the same time.

The square-shaped magic circle grew in size until it was six or seven kilometers in length.

Then the Divine Sword Mandala finally started to release lightning from the formation in the sky.

Countless flashes of lightning rained down from the sky like a heavy downpour. Not limited to the area around Godou and Luo Cuilian, the lightning also fell equally on the surrounding mountain range.

Godou instantly invoked the [Raptor].

Verethragna's seventh incarnation conferred divine speed. Despite its time limit and many inconveniences such as loss of mobility after use, this ability was the most effective means to evade the lightning.

Using divine speed, Godou raced across the land where massive holes were being gouged out by the platinum-colored lightning falling like a heavy rainstorm. While dodging the descending lightning left and right, he ran towards the "King of the End." In order to survive this crisis, the main culprit must be defeated first—

This was the same tactic as what Godou had used in ancient Gaul last time.

Using the same divine speed as back then, Godou closed in on the "King of the End." Right when he arrived at a couple dozen meters away, the same figure appeared as last time.

The masked war god, whose body was completely wrapped in strips of white cloth, also a user of divine speed, the Wind King!

(He came just as expected huh!?)

Godou yelled. However, no ordinary human would be able to hear him.

People in the normal world were unable to hear sounds produced by entities moving at divine speed. In spite of that, Godou heard a voice responding to him.

(Watch your elder sister's divine might carefully, O little brother .)

Luo Cuilian's beautiful voice—unbelievably—it was coming from Godou's shadow on the ground. Seeing that Godou was about to dash with divine speed, she had invoked her Daoist arts instantly, thereby hitching a ride on Godou's shadow—Probably some kind of trick along those lines. Furthermore, she was capable of discerning phenomena moving at divine speed as though it were the most natural thing in the world, even going as far as to carry a conversation casually. Godou smiled wryly.

Totally absurd. Indeed, it was a hundred years too early for him to be worrying about the sworn sister.

Wielding a single-edged greatsword, the Wind King slashed at Godou!

(Fist of the Tiger-Quelling Luohan!)

Accompanied by Luo Cuilian's spell words, a fist flew out from under Godou.

A straight punch performed by a muscular arm of bronze. Compared to the 180cm tall Godou, it was a thick arm at least double his size. Shooting out from the ground, the arm included the fist up to the elbow and struck the war god of wind with an uppercut.

This was the mighty arm created by the sworn elder sister's authority, Divine Might of Vajrapani. Furthermore, the martial arts involved, counterattacking the Wind King who was obstructing them while moving at divine speed, were of unparalleled mastery. This level of unarmed combat belonged to grandmasters of martial arts, surpassing even a certain Salvatore Doni.

The war god's body was blown away like ignited fireworks, flying towards the stars in the night sky.

Or perhaps he was going to fly out of the universe? That was the astounding speed with which the Wind King ascended through the air. A superlative feat that only Luo Cuilian's divine might was capable of achieving.

But even so, the war god of steel had not suffered a critical wound.

While flying high in the air, the Wind King tossed something down at the ground. It was the divine artifact made from a gold-iron alloy—the [Arrowhead's Discus].

(My, how long it has been, godslayer of my homeland!)

The Discus suddenly took on the form of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, descending upon Godou's with divine speed.

He even used the momentum of the fall to swing the Ruyi Jingu Staff. Godou jumped to the right, dodging the attack in the nick of time.

(Isn't this the Great Sage Equaling Heaven? Why is he present when he was supposed to have died?)

(It's apparently a power to summon heroes. That medallion causes slain gods to revive. Apart from the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, two other gods whom I know have also revived!)

Godou reported briefly in response to Her Eminence's surprise.

During this time, the lightning did not stop, continuing to fall like a heavy rainstorm.

Evasion. Evasion. Evasion. Evasion. Evasion. Evasion.

While Godou was using divine speed to jump and dash, just as he evaded the sixth bolt of lightning, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven attacked again.

He suddenly appeared on Godou's left, swinging the Ruyi Staff horizontally from the side. What blocked him was a giant arm of bronze extending out from Godou's shadow underfoot.

(How impetuous you are, Great Sage!)

(Sorry Nee-san, thanks for saving me!)

(Huhahaha. You guys are hard to kill as ever!)

The Great Sage, laughing heartily with delight, versus Godou who had barely escaped a crisis. Neither side paused at all. After all, the lightning of salvation kept descending nonstop. Even when running at divine speed, stopping for an instant would mean getting devoured by lightning.

Nevertheless, Godou dashed while biding his time, trying to approach the "King of the End."

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven was probably trying to harass and occupy Godou, preventing him from getting near.

(Why isn't it all three of you this time!? What happened to Lancelot and Perseus!?)

(Nonsense. My presence alone is enough already!)

(Most likely, by concentrating the divine power for summoning a hero, it would further reinforce the divinity's strength.)

Luo Cuilian's voice came from the shadow underfoot.

(Reviving dead gods on the mortal plane is a monumental miracle overturning the laws of heaven, earth and the underworld. It is difficult to believe that the revived will be as strong as when they were still alive. Presumably, by using the divine artifact seen earlier as a power source, the Great Sage's strength could be restored to its former heights!)

(Exactly. Since the clairvoyant Daoist priestess is here, I have to be cautious!)

While muttering, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven also dodged lightning and continued to harass Godou nonstop.

Trying to find an opening, he swung the Ruyi Staff. Meanwhile, he was also warily watching Godou's feet, staying on guard for Luo Cuilian lurking in Godou's shadow. The surprise attack earlier was probably not going to work again.

Godou frowned and looked at the "King of the End."

While running at full speed, Godou tried his best to stay within thirty or forty meters of that man.

Luckily, the sworn elder sister had sent the Wind King flying to the stratosphere, if Godou could seize this opportunity to successfully reach the—

However, the hero using the divine sword whispered dangerous spell words.

"I offer my prayers to the noble king of lightning, the warrior who mastered the use of all weapons. I implore you to awaken in my hand at this very moment... the supreme bow of might that you bestowed upon me in the past."

The lightning giving everyone a hard time suddenly ceased.

Floating high in the air, the Divine Sword Mandala stopped its indiscriminate attacks towards the ground.

But instead—RUMBLE! RUMBLE! Two bolts of lightning descended, accompanied by two giant roars of thunder.

Unbelievably, these two flashes of lightning were targeting the " King of the End."

However, the pale-haired aristocrat easily absorbed the scorching heat and impact.

Then immediately, a massive bow of steel manifested in his left hand. Furthermore, a quiver holding dozens of arrows also appeared by his feet.

The energy of the lightning was most likely converted into that large bow and quiver!

"In my current state of full power, achieved through the great ritual of the covenant—"

The pale-haired aristocrat was speaking in a refreshing and sonorous voice.

Even to the ears of Godou who was under the effects of divine speed, this voice still sounded unbelievably pleasant. A bright voice that permeated the ears and hearts of the listeners. Or perhaps this might be part of his authority.

"—I can unseal the most powerful weaponry, *the bow and its quiver*. Kusanagi Godou and Your Highness Luo Hao. You are about to face this bow and these arrows."

Speaking in a very modest tone of voice, the "King of the End" readied the massive bow of steel.

Godou trembled. Speaking of which, hadn't he heard this before ? The "King of the End" was an endlessly wandering hero with deep ties to the bow and arrows.

Furthermore, as though to corroborate Godou's memory, the earth began to shake.

Simply holding up the bow caused an earthquake. Roughly three or four on the Richter scale. At this moment, the "King of the End" closed his eyes unexpectedly.

In order to pierce Godou and Luo Hao who were dashing at divine speed, he was using the mind's eye!

"Legend tells of a great hero who shot down nine suns during antiquity at a kingdom in the orient. The arrows he fired had vanished along with the falling suns, but a master craftsman of the celestial realm was able to create an arrow for replicating the great feat."

The Devil King exterminating hero held up the steel bow in his left hand. Then using his right hand, he took out a jet-black arrow from the quiver by his foot.

Seeing this, the Great Sage instantly made a retracting motion with his head once and performed a somersault. Then he vanished just like that. He probably retreated to avoid getting caught in the attack.

Hovering in the air, the Divine Sword Mandala stopped firing lightning randomly.

It was like a soldier settling into silence to avoid obstructing the great general who was about to shoot an arrow.

"This is merely a counterfeit arrow, insufficient to shoot down the sun. However, it can still bring forth massive firepower when released towards the ground... Let us first begin with this level of power."

The "King of the End" finally nocked the jet-black arrow on the bowstring.

At this instant, Godou felt a chill down his back and started to run as fast as he could. With his back towards the hero and the jet-black arrow, he pulled his distance back as fast as he could using divine speed.

This was a Campione's usual intuition. At this rate—He was definitely going to die beyond a doubt.

Besides, even as fellow users of divine speed, didn't the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, capable of flying through the air, flee for his life as well?

(Nee-san, can you help me out as well!?)

(You leave me no choice but to spoil you. In that case, go up!)

Godou had been running all over the mountain ridge just now.

Using divine speed—the same speed as lightning—in almost one breath, he rushed over to the sloping surface of the peak with its sparse greenery, coming to a barren pinnacle where there was only solid rock.

(Jump, Godou!)

Hearing the command from underfoot, Godou jumped as hard as he could.

While using the [Raptor] incarnation, he was able to perform light and acrobatic movements as though his feet were winged. Through this leap, Godou jumped into the sky higher than the mountaintop.

The Minamibousou mountains were generally not very high, standing roughly three or four hundred meters above sea level.

This peak was the same. But compared to the land below, this was quite a sufficient height already. Having leapt into the night sky, Godou's excellent night vision allowed him to see the settlements scattered among the low-altitude mountains as well as artificial lighting appearing in the darkness of the night.

Furthermore, the sworn sister's resident shadow was still adhering firmly to Godou's feet.

Turning his head to look behind him while feeling impressed—Godou witnessed the jet-black arrow flying towards him in the air.

Clearly. the arrow was even faster than the lightning of salvation.

No matter how hard Godou ran to escape, it was surely going to pierce him. Just as Godou was about to be shot as an aerial target, the sworn sister's aid arrived in the nick of time.

(O north wind, sweeping across the vast lands, flying over countless miles!)

Spell words of flight.

Immediately, emerging from the shadow, Luo Cuilian caught Godou in her arms while in midair.

Then enveloped in golden light, the two of them soared upwards rapidly. This variant of Daoist arts seemed to belong to the same system as the flight magic used by Liliana.

In addition, the jet-black arrow pursuing them—suddenly exploded.

Platinum light erupted under their gaze, producing a large explosion affecting an area several kilometers in diameter. The mountain range of Minamibousou was spectacularly and tragically blown apart.

Part 3

"What's with this crazy huge firepower when he clearly said he didn't want to use excessive force?"

While relying on his sworn sister's power to fly through the sky, Godou temporarily deactivated his divine speed.

The scene of the giant explosion was spreading under his gaze. It was almost like a meteor crash. Meanwhile, the sworn sister was using Daoist arts effortlessly, flying with Godou in her arms while looking down at the massive explosion.

"The 'King of the End' is truly a formidable foe with astounding power... Godou, your trump card is still being prepared, isn't it?"

"I can't believe you already noticed that..."

Suddenly asked, Godou felt surprised.

"I clearly had it set to take place as secretly as possible."

"Don't underestimate your elder sister. Do know that I have been constantly by your side ever since my arrival, yes? I only stayed in the shadow the whole time in order to assess how much power my sworn little brother has gained since we last parted."

Looking at the side of Luo Hao's smiling face, Godou went "I see" and nodded.

He had definitely felt baffled by what would be considered a slightly subdued way of fighting for the elder sister with unparalleled arm strength. So this was her intent after all.

"So Godou, how goes the preparations?"

"Almost ready. But actually, I've attacked the 'King of the End' in the past using the same method. Although it went quite well last time... That was when that guy was in an incomplete state."

Godou recalled the battle in ancient Gaul and muttered.

"To be honest, I've no confidence whether it's gonna work on him when he's in peak condition."

"Be that as it may... It would be foolish to hesitate when no trump card of assured victory is available. What sort of power the enemy brings forth to block the strongest move from your arsenal—The result of that can serve as a yardstick for gauging differences in power level."

"Differences in power level..."

"This, too, is my first showdown against a war god who is this powerful. In fact, even I have trouble determining the exact extent of his strength."

"Even you're not sure!?"

Godou found it unbelievable that even Her Eminence Luo Hao, whose capabilities and experienced judgment were at the highest pinnacle, would say something like this.

Godou calmed himself. After all, attacks conducted via petty tricks were not going to be effective. Despite the risk of suffering a vicious counterattack in return, it was definitely the moment to take a slight gamble.

"Understood. Nee-san, I'll do everything I can first then I'll rely on you when I'm overwhelmed. Does that work?"

"Certainly. Believe in me and exert yourself to your full extent."

Luo Cuilian replied, filled with spirit.

"If by any chance should you perish in the end, upon our bonds as sworn siblings, I shall avenge you or die trying!"

Godou desperately resisted the urge to laugh at the sworn sister's words. If this were battle manga aimed at a youth audience, an irresponsible declaration of "I will surely protect you" would be the proper thing to say now, but of course, this kind of idea could not possibly exist in Luo Cuilian's mind.

Understanding that from the bottom of his heart, Godou simultaneously looked down at the world below.

The giant explosion caused by the jet-black arrow had already subsided, leaving a massive crater in the Minamibousou mountain range with a diameter of several kilometers. A truly surreal scene.

Currently, Godou was flying with his sworn sister at roughly a height of four or five hundred meters.

Despite the chilling wind that would freeze one to the very bones, his body of a Campione's felt scorching hot instead. This was due to battle instincts making the entire body's blood boil.

"Nee-san, I'm counting on you!"

Responding to this request, the sworn sister began to make a rapid descent.

At the same time, her figure disappeared while maintaining the flight spell. Turning into a shadow once more, this time, she adhered to Godou's back.

Flying above the giant crater, they were approaching the ground at high speed.

The yellow light created by Luo Cuilian was transporting Godou. However, this glow, descending from the sky, suddenly swerved left, in order to evade an arrow shot from the ground.

Godou looked downwards, only to see the "King of the End" standing upright on a mountain ridge.

Vegetation was sparse there, offering good visibility. He nocked an arrow on the steel bow.

He was firing at the rapidly descending duo. Firing. Firing. Firing. Instead of the jet-black arrow, he fired four times in succession using arrows with iron arrowheads and shafts made of wood and feathers.

Despite looking ordinary, these arrows were probably hiding terrifying firepower within them.

Controlling the light of flight magic, Luo Cuilian evaded the four arrows while continuing to approach the ground.

Then the "King of the End" threw the steel bow away. Pulling the Divine Sword of Salvation out from the ground where it had been stabbed, he pointed the glorious blade's tip at the airborne Godou. Godou could predict an imminent melee battle.

In turn, Godou summoned his flashy partner, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. The partner that always made its abode in his right arm was currently far away.

"Ama no Murakumo! And Athena! Use that usual move!"

In response to this command, the giant crater below went through a change.

Several cracks appeared in the central zone of the giant hole that measured several several kilometers in diameter and penetrated the mountain range. Then the crater began to shake violently. The earthquake was confined to the bottom of the crater.

Then a giant sphere passed through the soil and emerged from the shaking earth.

A sphere that seemed to be a conglomeration of dark matter.

Roughly forty or fifty meters in diameter, this sphere was the culprit causing the localized earthquake—generated from Godou's mystic technique of the [Storm Bringer], the black star of darkness known as a gravitational storm.

Although this mystic technique could produce astounding firepower, activating it and raising it to maximum power required a great expenditure of time. This drawback was hard to overcome.

But this time, he was assisted in combat by Pallas Athena who had retrieved her divinity as a great mother goddess of the earth.

A great mother goddess of the earth, ruling over the subterranean underworld in addition to the ground above. The goddess, whose symbol was the snake, held dominion over the two realms, above and below ground.

That was precisely why Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi had suggested summoning Pallas Athena into itself.

Using her powers as a mother earth goddess to teleport underground, they made preparations for the black blade. In order to pull it to the ground surface when its power reached its maximum critical point—

The greatest uncertainty was whether the dying goddess still had enough remaining strength to accomplish this.

However, Pallas Athena and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi had accomplished their mission perfectly. Surfacing from underground, the black star rose even higher towards the sky, finally converging with Godou in midair.

The sphere of darkness—Godou was now hovering in its center.

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi manifested in his right hand. There was also Athena's snake form entwined around the katana-like blade.

In this manner, Godou began a rapid descent towards the ground together with the [Storm Bringer]'s black star.

The "King of the End" was currently waiting at the targeted destination. Holding up the Divine Sword of Salvation, he was pointing the shining sword tip at Godou in the air.

Then platinum-colored lightning formed a sphere surrounding the "King of the End."

In order to resist the black star that enveloped Godou, he was spreading the lightning from the Divine Sword of Salvation around himself.

Hence, the hero wrapped in a ball of lightning versus Godou descending from the heavens with a black star—A violent clash. A reenactment of the repeated showdown that had occurred previously at Kisarazu as well as the Rhine's shore in ancient Roman times.

The black star of the Devil King versus the white star of the savior.

With stark contrast, the two collided in a showdown of polar opposites—

"Guh... Ohhhhhhhhhhh!"

Godou yelled while pouring magic power into Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

As soon as the black and white stars clashed violently, he instantly understood. The enemy's power was unlike in the past. If this contest of strength continued, the black star was going to be annihilated in less than two minutes.

"I already took such great pains to prepare, but the gap is still so large!?"

Godou's grumbling lips were twisted in savagery. It was a smile .

Despite the massive power gap between him and the opponent, he was feeling unbelievably exhilarated.

Probably because there was nothing to do except resist to the bitter end. There was no choice apart from going all out.

"Since there's not much time left, Ama no Murakumo, try your hardest to absorb that guy's lightning in the meantime—Open a path. You help out too, Athena!"

While pouring his entire magic power into the partner, Godou commanded. He knew this was quite an unreasonable demand.

Nevertheless, the sword born for conflict replied "Affirmative!" succinctly, whereas the snake, wrapped around the blade, glared at Godou with terrifying eyes that seemed to be saying " unnecessary babbling, fool."

During this time, the clash between the black and white stars still continued.

Currently, the two stars had shrunk to diameters of ten-odd meters—No, rather than shrink, they had compressed.

This was to increase the density of power so as to resist in full force. Thanks to that, Godou's distance to the "King of the End" had decreased. He could see the hero's handsome face clearly.

Stern and courageous, yet colored with battle weariness like a layer of rust.

Godou did not feel hatred towards him. Neither did he feel anger. However, he felt a sense of competitiveness. A sense of defiance to resist the being of ultimate power no matter what.

Godou grinned savagely again, mustering even more magic power from his energy center deep in the abdomen under the navel.

Fueled with this power, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi enacted a miracle on a small scale. The [Storm Bringer]'s essence was absorbing all creation like a black hole. Embodying this principle, the blade was absorbing the electrical energy overflowing from the space between Godou and the "King of the End." Absorbing, absorbing, absorbing nonstop.

Finally, a path was opened at last.

A path reaching the hero directly while dodging the scorching lightning of salvation.

"Hmm!?"

"Now is the moment, Nee-san!"

While the pale-haired hero exclaimed in surprise, Godou yelled.

Immediately, Luo Cuilian's beautiful upright figure flew out from her sworn brother's back. Racing lightly and rapidly along the opened path, her unparalleled mastery of *qinggong*, the Chinese martial arts technique of movement, it was as though she had turned weightless.

"Nothing less expected from godslayers, larger than life characters who have reached the heavens through their own strength!"

"Save such flattery and praise for after you have witnessed our potential as siblings—Hah!"

While commending them, impressed, the "King of the End" raised the divine sword to an upper stance.

However, Luo Cuilian used the [Dragon's Roar and Tiger's Howl] to deflect the glorious divine sword then proceeded to deliver a mighty blow to the hero's stalwart body.

Her Eminence Luo Cuilian the Devil King emitted a roar that turned into a shockwave of magical wind, clearing all obstacles in its path.

Sealing off the enemy's counterattack, she closed in on the hero spectacularly.

The Ruler of the Martial Realm silently attacked using her most prided weapon. With extreme speed, she used her dominant right hand, pressing her palm against the chest of the "King of the End."

This palm was pressed precisely on the heart—the vital spot corresponding to the Danzhong pressure point in Chinese martial arts.

Godou knew very well that the hero of the divine sword was in command of masterful swordsmanship. Despite being a master swordsman, he was still unable to react to this ordinary looking palm strike. This truly made clear the fact that the gentle strike that Luo Cuilian had just unleashed was her strongest palm technique.

Simply by pushing out her hand in a simple movement, she inflicted a blow on the supreme expert.

Literally the pinnacle of martial arts secret techniques. Furthermore, like her sworn brother, Luo Cuilian had poured her entire magic power into her right palm, infusing it with force from the Divine Might of Vajrapani.

Using this mighty force to perform a karate chop, one could probably slice mountains and rivers apart with ease.

Using this mighty force to perform a punch, one would surely shake heaven and earth, even to the point of making sacred Mount Tai rumble.

Struck by such a mighty force in a vital spot, the "King of the End" screamed tragically.

"
AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH
!"

Then immediately, the valorous hero's entire body erupted with brilliant platinum-colored light.

Part 4

The entire area was rendered scorched earth.

The battleground for the two godslayers and the "King of the End" had turned into an incinerated plain.

This was originally somewhere in the mountains. However, the mountainous portion serving as the battlefield had been blown away. Trees had been swept clear. Many lives inhabiting the winter mountain forest had been extinguished.

Watching this tragic scene, the "King of the End" shook his head silently. This all came by his hand personally.

His life was intimately linked to the Divine Sword of Salvation.

So long as this blade remained intact, he would resurrect again and again even after dying.

When suffering Her Eminence Luo Hao's fierce palm strike earlier, he had increased his body's "bond with the the Divine Sword of Salvation" to the maximum in order to resist the impact. As a result, turning into a "living divine sword," he was able to endure despite the devastating blow.

As a side effect, he had released lightning of salvation from his entire body, sweeping the entire area away.

There was nothing left in the vicinity. Everything had been incinerated by the lightning, blown apart by the violent impact that altered the landscape, turned into an entire patch of scorched earth. Kusanagi Godou and his sworn sister had also vanished.

If one were to ask what had remained from the battle, there was only the dull pain still lingering on his chest.

With these depressed thoughts, the "King of the End" gazed upon the trail of destruction he had left behind.

Among what had been destroyed, this also included the spirits that had helped him earlier—

"Your Excellency the Savior."

A voice called out. It was the bold and beautiful voice of the hero Perseus.

He arrived at the side of the "King of the End." The Great Sage Equaling Heaven and Lancelot were present too. Returning from the far side of the sky, the Wind King also came along.

"Should we pursue them?"

"Not necessary."

In his current state of heightened indestructibility, his power was too difficult to control.

More openings than usual. The "King of the End" shook his head.

"I am slightly exhausted from fighting at full strength after so long since the last time. Resting is necessary. You three heroes will face various inconveniences if you leave my side, won't you? Let us withdraw for now."

"Regarding that..."

Perseus smiled with delight and glanced at the Wind King for an instant.

"There is also the option of passing the task to that gentleman over there."

Hearing this, the unidentified wind god suddenly vanished. Riding the night wind that happened to blow past, he took his leave in front of everyone here.

Hence, the ancient Roman hero with hair the color of the Japanese Yellow Rose nodded greatly.

"A certain Mr. Wind doesn't seem too willing to make a move without careful consideration, just as I thought."

"I hope for your understanding. Like everyone here, he is also a hero whose glorious renown is unshakable. Perhaps he is worried about the risk of identity exposure if he were to mobilize too frequently."

Hearing the "King of the End" apologize as the master, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven commented with heartfelt emotion.

"It's truly commendable how devoted he is to obeying his lord and master's wishes. I've got to make my lil' bros learn from him."

"Lord Monkey, I am afraid they are merely taking after you, their eldest brother, aren't they?"

"Seeing as that's the case, I'm gonna rest for now. I'm not boasting when I say that old Sun here is known as the number one in the celestial realm for slacking on the job."

Leaving these words behind, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven disappeared.

Perseus did the same as the celestial realm's former Keeper of the Horses, leaving elegant laughter. Thus, only the "King of the End" and Lancelot du Lac remained.

"...Your Majesty, how about a brief moment of slumber?"

The female knight of white advised.

"After unleashing your authority to this extent, your body ought to be quite scorching in temperature."

"You are right."

Nodding, the "King of the End" gazed at his own right hand.

No different from usual, his hand consisted of a pale palm and five fingers, all shaped exquisitely. But including this hand, his entire body was giving off intense heat. An ordinary person standing next to him would probably feel as though they were suffering in front of a furnace.

Even if he were to jump into a river, the water would evaporate immediately, turning into steam hanging in the air.

"Lancelot. Even before meeting you and the goddess Gwenhwyfar in the ancient past, I have been fighting continually. I hibernate every time I finish the mission of exterminating Devil Kings, instantly jumping into battle against new Devil Kings immediately after awakenening. This has repeated countless times. "

The "King of the End" suddenly brought up the past.

"In the past, I always woke up with almost all my power depleted. Hence, in order to fight, I would need to gather the essence of the earth. For this purpose, I would set off on a long journey of wandering across the lands."

"Indeed."

Lancelot concurred.

"Unable to bear the sight of that, this knight's companion Gwenhwyfar decided to create the Holy Grail, even using herself as the material while on the verge of death. For the purpose of gathering the essence of mother earth goddesses beforehand so as to provide you with power without needing to go through the hardships of wandering. Furthermore, it had its own value too."

The deity of knights, worshiped by equestrian tribes, swept her gaze across the incinerated plain.

"On this occasion, you faced an intense battle immediately after awakening."

"Yes. To her who created the Holy Grail... I really ought to express my gratitude."

A smiling expression surfaced on the lips of the "King of the End," one that could be called a smile yet with a certain sense of bitterness.

Bowing mundanely towards him, the goddess Lancelot also disappeared.

"Oh man... It feels like I'm always saying this every time."

A hour or two after the intense battle that had even changed Minamibousou's landscape...

Under the moonlight and winter night sky, Godou was currently located within the premises of an old and historic temple . Having left the mountainous area that had served as the battlefield, he was back in human settlement.

The night was silent as though the earlier commotion had been a dream.

"I was definitely expecting to die just now. It's all thanks to you, Nee-san, that I was saved. Thank you."

"No need for thanks. After all, I too escaped death thanks to your quick wits."

The transcendent beauty in front of him under the moonlight was Luo Cuilian, of course.

However, her pale and beautiful face was more pallid than usual. Her energy and vitality were utterly depleted. Anemia might even have arose.

Slightly earlier, after she had delivered the ultimate palm strike to the "King of the End"...

The pale-haired hero had roared like a wild beast from the pain before proceeding to release lightning of salvation from his entire body with extreme potency.

In order to block the attack, Luo Cuilian had summoned avatars .

Through defeating an Om pair of Buddha Guardians, she had obtained the authority: Divine Might of Vajrapani. This power was not purely confined to the application of monstrous strength.

It also enabled Luo Cuilian to summon two Buddha Guardians as avatars, allowing them to exert monstrous strength in turn.

These Benevolent Kings were roughly three times the size of Godou's stature, their muscular bodies shining with golden luster. Covered with bulging musculature all over, the two guardians used their bodies to shield their beautiful master. At the same time, Luo Cuilian poured her own remaining magic power wholly into their bodies, further strengthening the avatars—

Thanks to the "shield of muscle" provided by the two golden giants to block the attack, a time delay was bought. Right in front of the hero who was releasing lightning, Luo Cuilian avoided instant death. Activating divine speed, Kusanagi Godou picked up his sworn sister in his arms and ran at full speed. It was for this purpose that a time delay was needed.

Back then, Godou was still using the [Raptor] incarnation.

Hence, carrying his sworn sister in his arms, he raced across many mountains, finally reaching a human settlement. Only after rushing into the ancient temple did he shut off his divine speed.

Godou secretly sighed in relief.

The [Raptor], notoriously difficult to control, had extended in usage time and had developed to the point where he could temporarily deactivate it in the middle of using the incarnation. As a result, he was saved on this occasion...

"So those guys didn't chase us after all. They should have noticed we were trying to run away."

"Perhaps they had no intention of doing so. However... I can also sense that they had no reason to give chase. That being said, I have no definite basis for that feeling."

Like Mariya Yuri, the sworn sister also possessed the power of spirit vision.

Naturally, that type of vague feeling must not be underestimated. While Godou nodded and said "oh I see," the almighty elder sister, lacking neither valor nor intelligence, announced sonorously:

"We shall confirm the veracity of this during the future rematch. This is also what you intend to do, Godou, yes?"

Truly an amazing declaration. Despite retreating in defeat just earlier, she was not shaken in the slightest. Not a single shred of fear. Calmly and indifferently, she was already considering the next rematch.

Switching mindsets with astounding speed.

Her Eminence Luo Hao possessed pride and self-esteem even higher than the gods of the heavens. Seeing as that was the case, it would not be surprising even if she did not react to defeat with shock—

Rather than indomitable spirit, her psychological make-up would be more accurately captured by the saying, "forgetting the pain as soon as the wound healed."

This sworn sister truly lived up to her name as a Campione. A species of human sharing similarities with Salvatore Doni and Madame Aisha.

Just as Godou secretly snickered to himself at this hilarious thought...

"Kusanagi Godou..."

He heard Pallas Athena's voice calling to him. Stabbed in the ground before him was Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. The voice was coming from the silver snake wrapped around the blade.

"Perhaps thou hast noticed, one's days are numbered..."

"Yeah. I got the feeling that's the case."

A confession coming from the old enemy whose fate was intertwined with his in mysterious and unfavorable ways.

Still coiled around the blade, the silver snake showed no signs of movement. The scales' luster was also becoming dull. She looked like she was about to enter hibernation.

To begin with, Pallas Athena had removed the seal of dragons and snakes by paying her life as the price.

Her death was already predicted. Godou spoke up:

"Do you want to duel me as a last request?"

Despite his clear intention to taunt with belligerent words, Godou spoke in an inexplicably gentle tone of voice.

The silver snake, transformed from the Divine Ancestor, spoke with the tone of voice belonging to a goddess enlightened and liberated from the mental shackles of life, death, debts and grudges instead of haughtiness filled with fighting spirit:

"This is not a bad ending. Nevertheless, one still findeth it lacking. Verily, one ought to choose the strongest warrior at hand as the final prey..."

"In other words, you want to fight that guy."

Choosing to fight the "King of the End" at this kind of critical moment, that was definitely style befitting a goddess of war. Godou smiled.

"Currently, the majority of the essence serving as that man's power source came from oneself—absorbed from one's time as Athena. This will undoubtedly become a critical deciding factor."

Coiled around Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, the silver snake was staring at Godou sharply.

"However, 'tis probably impossible. One cannot last until then."

"Specifically, how much time is left?"

"Mayhap a hundred beats in thy chest, mayhap three hundred beats before one's last breath is drawn. In any case, time is scarce."

Since the goddess was not looking at a watch, it was probably a metaphor. Her remaining life was most likely less than ten minutes .

While Godou felt powerless, the silver snake said solemnly to him:

"Well then... Thou still owest one a favor. Kusanagi Godou."

"Favor?"

"Indeed. A past promise yet to be fulfilled. Thou mentionedst previously. When one returneth after undergoing the cycle of

rebirth, a rematch to redeem past defeat. Be that as it may, 'twas always one who approached thee in the past—"

"Hold on, you've recovered your memories?"

This was the conversation that had taken place with [Heretic Athena] just prior to her death.

At the same time, Godou also noticed that the silver snake had said "one's time as Athena." In other words, there was no mistake.

With certainty in his heart, Godou returned her gaze. However, the silver snake simply flicked its forked tongue.

Indifferent words. Without excess verbosity nor words of sorrow. However, seeing this aloof reaction very much in the snake goddess Athena's style, Godou felt rather unbelievable.

Could this be the result of absorbing her into Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, allowing her to come into contact with the [Storm Bringer] that could be considered her posthumous masterpiece?

Perhaps some sort of change had occurred in the goddess' soul while she was having another showdown against Kusanagi Godou .

Godou suddenly laughed out loud. Who cares about this kind of thing? The reptile in front of him was precisely his former enemy. This fact was the most important of all.

"You're right. I owe you one. So, how am I going to make it up to you?"

"Naturally, to use what is left of this feeble life to exact revenge on that man."

Athena's snake form was wrapped around Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. That long serpentine body had been absorbed into the sacred sword.

"Thou shalt prepare the appropriate time and venue. One is counting on you, mine enemy of destiny."

This was her demand. Athena spoke no more.

Staying dormant inside Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi like a hibernating snake, she had probably halted all living activity, in order to use the remainder of her lifespan on the battle against the "King of the End."

"Nothing less expected from the reincarnation of a great goddess. As a queen, the final moments before one's end ought to be like this."

Watching them the whole time, the sworn sister offered rare praise.

Seeing as they were both lofty queens with haughty self-esteem and forceful personalities, there apparently existed areas where they could understand each other.

"Nee-san, do you want to come with me to Tokyo? Yinghua and my friends are there. Let's head over there to regroup first."

"I wouldn't mind. I agree that it is necessary too."

Even as someone living detached from the mundane world, holding misgivings against civilized society, she was a Campione, never careless in matters related to battle.

Confronted with the emergency situation of the strongest Devil King exterminator's arrival, she agreed readily to a request that she would surely reject instantly during normal times.

Wonderful, thinking that, Godou nodded and said:

"If possible, Nee-san, could you take me to where Yinghua lives ? Yeah, using that Daoist arts thing, couldn't you teleport us?"

"....."

"I don't mind either if we fly like just now."

"....."

"Nee-san?"

"My little brother, I shall first inform you of one fact."

Introducing the topic with a solemn demeanor, Luo Cuilian stared at Godou intently.

"Defending against the lightning of the 'King of the End' earlier, I manifested a pair of Benevolent Kings. Only by doing that did we barely manage to survive."

"Yeah, that was really a great help."

"During that time, the *qi* inside myself was almost completely depleted."

Qi meant magic power. Godou went "Ehh!?" in shock.

"It was necessary to go that far in order to block that hero's ultimate lightning. The result is that I am currently unable to perform even the simplest of Daoist arts. In this present state, we cannot head over to Yinghua's residence using Daoist arts."

The sworn sister, Luo Cuilian, confessed with a very displeased look.

As the martial artist standing at the world's tallest pinnacle, she was also an outstanding user of Daoist arts. In addition, she possessed peerless beauty and was adept in all sorts of arts and skills. In fact, even her culinary prowess was on the level of masters.

Precisely because of that, she must be very displeased whenever compelled to admit that any task was beyond her.

"I get it now..."

Godou remarked, feeling a deep chord struck within himself. In the past, Lucretia Zola had also suffered from this kind of state.

Back then, the Witch of Sardinia had been bedridden for many days due to fatigue. Since the sworn elder sister still looked quite energetic, perhaps it was due to a gap in training.

Also, Godou suddenly felt worried.

In that case, wasn't the current situation quite dangerous?

"We are currently at the city of Minamibousou..."

Godou had confirmed using his cellphone's map software already. Their battle against the "King of the End" had taken place near Minamibousou's famous mountain of Iyo. After traversing many mountains by running away at divine speed, they had arrived at a settlement by the foot of the mountain.

This was a small settlement with homes scattered sparsely between hills.

Even so, walking on foot to the nearest train station would still take substantial time. However.

"Nee-san, have you ever taken a train before?"

"Are you referring to the steam locomotive of rumor? Needless to say, I can't possibly have ridden it before."

A sudden problematic statement. By contemporary times, trains powered by the steam engine had become obsolete a long time ago , turned into antiques. Furthermore, people who have never experienced traveling by train would not normally use "needless to say" to express themselves.

Riding a train car together with an indeterminate number of ordinary people—

In the past, Luo Cuilian had boldly declared the following.

'Someone of my stature obviously cannot have a direct conversation with commoners.'

'Those who lay eyes on my body must gouge out their own eyes ; those who hear my voice must cut off their ears in penance.'

Furthermore, she was someone holding the view that "the decline of human society began with the invention of the steam engine."

She lived secluded in a mountain forest without electricity precisely because she was an excessive adherent to the philosophy of natural living.

Inside the spacious and comfortable interior of a train on a regional rail line... The sworn sister smashing the Uchibou Line train with a palm strike... This was very probable. Even without the ability to use Daoist arts, she was a heroine fully capable of demolishing a building or two with her bare hands.

However, it was already late at night. It was worth doubting whether any trains to Tokyo were still running.

Quietly trying to review other means of transportation, Godou began to think again.

"In that case, let's take a car."

After entering this ancient temple, the first thing Godou did was call Erica to inform the girls of his safety.

Asking them for a pickup by car probably would not be a problem. However, Godou still inquired just to be safe.

"What about cars—"

"Of course I have ridden them before. It happened in the past with a group of leading knights-errant of the martial realm, after a great victory in battle. Returning in triumph, I was treated to the cheering of the populace and festivities were held for three days and three nights to extol my martial virtues. In order to respond to the people's cheering, I rode an ox-drawn carriage to parade in various place."

"Oh I see, there's that too."

Car = Official state vehicle used for victory parades in the town streets, and drawn by oxen or horses as well.

Such were the preconceived notions belonging to Her Eminence Luo Hao.

What level of tolerance would she actually afford to a journey by car traversing the mountain roads of the Bousou Peninsula, the Tokyo Bay Aqua-Line and the Shuto Expressway?

Godou's low expectations were definitely not borne out of mere pessimism.

Furthermore, he also realized at this point.

Even after overcoming a million obstacles, returning to the twenty-three wards of Tokyo...

However, where could he arrange accommodations for the sworn elder sister? Godou tried to ponder candidate locations. The Kusanagi home in the Bunkyou ward, Erica's luxury apartment, the Sayanomiya family mansion, the stronghold of Hong Kong's Lu family, the shady maid building in Akihabara... No matter which place was chosen, Godou had a feeling that the supremely self-centered Luo Cuilian could hardly be satisfied...

"So this is probably what they call a 'cul-de-sac'?"

While Godou was shocked at the realization of the imminent dead end situation...

He heard the sound of rotors from the distant sky, something one would not expect in a mountain village during the night. A helicopter was approaching while shining a light towards the ground.

"Master's glorious virtue is like the radiant sun hanging in the sky, bringing light to the populace on the ground with universal fairness."

Inside the cabin of a large helicopter belonging to the Japan Air Self-Defense Force...

The one offering fluent praise to Luo Cuilian, the leader of the Holy Cult of the Five Mountains as well as his own master in martial arts, was of course, Lu Yinghua.

"It would be an utterly foolish notion to expect Her Eminence Luo Hao, who ought to live in heaven, to walk along terrestrial roads, hence according to your disciple's judgment, this ride was specially prepared."

"I see. That would be quite quick-witted for you, my young eagle."

"Your disciple is filled with trepidation. All credit goes to having received Master's edification. Your disciple, Lu Yinghua, remembers Master's teachings at all times, thereby reminding oneself strictly to strive for self-improvement each and every day—Ouch!?"

"Excessive flattery only serves to expose unseemliness."

Despite having depleted her energy, the peerless Luo Cuilian remained impressive as ever. A lightly exhaled breath turned into a shockwave, reaching a punch's level of force. An absurd and superlative feat performed effortlessly.

Striking her disciple in the forehead with this attack, she spoke nonchalantly:

"You are a knight-errant of the martial realm despite your young age. You must strive towards the goal of becoming a man worthy of everyone's respect."

"M-Master's teachings are greatly appreciated..."

The helicopter flew along the coastline, then crossing Tokyo Bay night sky along the Aqua-Line, they finally returned to Tokyo.

Godou secretly whispered to Amakasu who was present on the helicopter as well.

(I'm impressed you managed to bring Yinghua along.)

(Regarding the art of getting along with Her Eminence, he is unquestionably the world's foremost expert.)

(But from what I've heard, helicopters almost never fly during the night.)

(Yes, this part was quite tough too. I had to beg an acquaintance in the JASDF for a favor in order to borrow a helicopter equipped with night vision systems as well as an experienced pilot familiar with mountain rescue operations. After all, trying to fly a helicopter at night in Japan is almost impossible unless I go this far .)

The two of them were conversing with their voices lowered as much as possible.

Like her disciple, Her Eminence Luo Hao also possessed astounding powers of hearing. If she were to listen intently, she could probably pick up this entire conversation clearly. However, Godou did not think she would care about Amakasu's talking. It was probably fine.

(By the way, how are you planning to arrange Nee-san's accommodations?)

(This posed a real dilemma for quite a while, but luckily, we've already arranged for *that place*. Yeah, it's already in sight.)

(...Huh?)

The helicopter happened to be flying in the air above Tokyo's Sumida Ward.

They were advancing towards a towering structure that stood as quite a familiar landmark.

"No way, could it be *that*?"

The height of this building was 634m indeed. In fact, this high-rise building was even closer to the heavens than the mountain range where the battle against the "King of the End" had taken place. A broadcasting tower built recently in the twenty-first century.

The Tokyo Skytree was waiting quietly ahead of the helicopter's current route of advance.

Chapter 4 - The Vagabond Sword God

Part 1

"Truly what a shame. In the end, I missed the show..."

Princess Alice sighed and voiced her feelings.

She was currently in the Kantou region of Japan. This was her first time visiting again, several months after the incident involving Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong. Like last time, she was only visiting in the form of ectoplasm.

Princess Alice was highly experienced in using the spirit power of psychic sensing.

This special power was extremely rare. Only a small fraction of miko were capable of learning it. Through this type of spirit power , one could separate ectoplasm from the body and send it to faraway places.

Naturally, eating was not possible in this form, thus reducing the pleasure of traveling by half at least.

However, other pleasures were gained in exchange. Like now, Alice was making flexible use of ectoplasm's advantage, being able to move lightly through the air to enjoy a voyage through the sky.

While flying in the sky above the city of Minamibousou in the prefecture of Chiba, she looked down at the relatively low-altitude mountains below.

Mountains filled her entire field of view. Only scattered homes dotted the landscape sparsely. Population density was probably low in this area.

"I want to confirm the legendary hero's whereabouts, at least."

There were extremely few people who could personally savor the scenery from 500m in the air.

While enjoying this privilege, Alice was greeted by the morning glow.

Several hours had passed since the battle between the revived " King of the End" and the two godslayers, Kusanagi Godou and Luo Cuilian, hence it was now morning.

Following news of Pallas Athena, Alice had entered the Philippines last night.

As for news regarding the Divine Ancestor's intention to land at Japan and the arrival of the "King of the End," she had already received reports from the Witenagemot staff stationed in Tokyo.

Upon learning of these major events, she hurried over to Japan but the battle had already ended.

No helping it, she thought, at least I'll use this sky journey as an opportunity to scout while I'm at it.

"I must meet Kusanagi-sama as soon as possible. I'll contact Erica as soon as the sun rises completely. As for Her Eminence Luo

Hao... No helping it, I'll just have to brace myself and take a gamble."

Alice had never met the godslayer hailing from southern China.

The other party probably did not recognize Alice either. The level of the Witenagemot's chairperson only reached so far in the eyes of the peerless Luo Cuilian.

I must use this opportunity to establish deeper relations—Just as Alice was thinking that...

Suddenly, she felt a gust of terrifying, bone-chilling air. As ectoplasm that was not supposed to feel cold in the first place, what was happening abruptly?

Her body shook and started falling towards the ground of Minamibousou.

Instead of lowering her altitude intentionally, this was happening because she suddenly became unable to fly with stability.

"Power is being—sucked away...?"

Alice noticed that magic power was continually sucked out from her ectoplasm.

At this rate, let alone flying, even the state of spirit body separation would be hard to sustain. She must return to her body as quickly as possible—Alice's own body sleeping in the Greenwich mansion!

"Ominous... wind?"

Feeling the stimulation of spirit senses, Europe's supreme Miko-Hime whispered.

The wind was especially strong this morning. Alice had been enjoying the feeling of strolling through the air amidst strong gales .

However, her consciousness was starting to grow a bit hazy. She was almost at her limit.

"I-I must return right now. But with such an interesting—no, important—incident happening, I absolutely cannot remain uninvolved..."

Despite being a princess of noble birth, she was also driven by a sense of morbid curiosity.

While whispering these determined words of tragic affectation, Princess Alice started focusing her concentration to have her ectoplasm make an emergency return to English soil.

Part 2

The revival of the "King of the End" last night had brought a good many news stories to Japan.

First was the meteor crashing in the southern part of Bousou Peninsula. Many people witnessed it—the trail of a mysterious flying object falling from satellite orbit.

This had apparently caused a commotion in the areas of Chiba, Tokyo and Kanagawa surrounding Tokyo Bay.

Then immediately, the media discovered and reported about the crater left behind, deep in the mountains of Minamibousou. This also unsettled the people of Japan quite substantially.

Nevertheless, this was merely the prelude.

After the floating island crashed but before the "King of the End " awakened, a golden aurora was shining in the night sky.

This phenomenon was not confined to the sky above Godou and the others. Its scale was wide enough to cover the entire sky above the Kantou Plain. This included the entire region of Kanagawa Prefecture, Tokyo City, Saitama Prefecture, Chiba Prefecture and Ibaraki Prefecture as well as portions of the prefectures of Tochigi and Gunma—

Furthermore, strong winds had been blowing since early this morning.

Especially in the center of Tokyo City, one would easily get knocked over by high-rise winds if one failed to pay attention.

"By this point, normal information control won't be possible."

Godou sighed.

Classes were not cancelled the next day after the extraordinary phenomena. Since morning, classmates and teachers had been distracted and unsettled. After spending a whole day's lessons with them, it was after school for Godou.

Next to him, Liliana nodded.

"After all, the supernatural phenomena were witnessed over quite a large area."

"What transpired last night also resulted in major news outside Japan," Erica informed them.

Since it was after school, everyone was in uniform.

Furthermore, they were traveling together to the Tokyo Skytree in the Sumida Ward, on their way to the observation deck by taking a high-speed elevator.

"However, it's also thanks to the current situation that sealing off the Skytree hasn't caused a commotion..."

The elevator stopped and the doors opened just as Erica finished.

Godou stepped into the observation deck with the two knights.

This floor was 350m above ground level. In place of walls, a 360 -degree glass window offered a full view of the Tokyo metropolis' skyscrapers. Godou had been here before.

But today, the observation deck was completely different.

Laid over the floor was a soft red carpet that felt as though one's heels would sink into them. All the tables and furniture at the reception counter, the official souvenir shop, the cafe and the restaurant etc had been either moved away or cleverly camouflaged to avoid attracting attention.

Moved here as a substitute was a minimalist set of furniture including a sofa and an exquisitely designed desk.

Elegant and relaxed, the interior decor's resembled that of a hotel lobby subscribing to a style of subtlety. Well, only if one were to ignore the detail that their location was 350m above ground with an expansive view.

Next to a window of special glass, five meters thick...

The demonic cult leader Luo Cuilian was sitting in a meditation pose with Tokyo's blue sky as the backdrop.

Currently, the Skytree's observation deck as well as the galleria above had been commandeered to use as her accommodations.

Last night, the History Compilation Committee had issued a commandeering order and applied emergency redecoration.

'She's probably not going to obediently check into hotel suites or state guesthouses. Even if we give up the entire National Diet Building or the Tokyo City Hall, I fear that Her Eminence still won't be satisfied...'

Amakasu had offered these comments the previous night.

Furthermore, Luo Cuilian had frowned with boredom after being brought here, but at least "the view from the tallest structure in Japan" seemed sufficient to placate her pride. She did not express rejection coldly.

Currently, the Tokyo Skytree was completely sealed off, only allowing authorized personnel to enter.

"How's your condition, Nee-san?"

"Not especially good. I have been practicing *neigong* throughout the entire night until morning, trying hard to recover my lost energy... But progress has been limited."

The sworn sister replied grimly to Godou's question.

She was apparently sitting cross-legged in the lotus position, similar to Zen meditation, for the sake of practicing *neigong*, a set of Chinese breathing, meditation and spiritual disciplines. In addition, a mixed-gender group of ten-odd people were standing in a line some slight distance from Luo Cuilian, awaiting orders like palace attendants.

Some were dressed in suits while others had open-collared shirts and work clothes.

This group was presumably assembled from staff of the History Compilation Committee as well as subordinates from the Lu Family of Hong Kong. All of them were standing motionlessly at

attention, so nervous that their bodies were stiff. They probably knew that any mistake in front of Her Eminence, no matter how small, would entail harsh punishment.

However, there were also others present in addition to this group.

Seishuuin Ena and Mariya Yuri, as well as Amakasu Touma. These three could be considered Her Eminence Luo Hao's closest acquaintances. In order to help the guest hailing from the neighboring country "feel right at home," they had been standing by at the Skytree since early morning.

The Hime-Miko were all dressed formally, in other words, as shrine maidens.

"I'm sorry for making you two miss school because of Nee-san."

Of course for Ena, the very fact of being in Tokyo was equivalent to skipping school already, but let's skip that.

While talking to them, Godou noticed that the usually cheerful Ena was glaring angrily at her fellow miko in a rare display.

Also, Yuri's face was frighteningly pale. She looked like she was suffering.

"Are you two okay?"

"Listen to me, Your Majesty. Yuri has been hiding her high fever . She said she'd be forced to rest today had she confessed the truth. "

"I-It does not count as high fever... Right now, I can still move."

Confronted with her friend's angry words, Yuri replied timidly.

She was definitely unsteady on her feet. Godou walk over to her side and reached out.

"Seriously, this fever is quite high."

"G-Godou-san!?"

Godou examined her face while touching her forehead, startling Yuri.

The girl, who could not be considered hardy in the first place, had also ruined her health recently. As the Yamato Nadeshiko with a strong sense of responsibility, was she overexerting herself at a time like this?

Worrying about this fact, Godou felt heat on his hand akin to that of hand warmer's.

"Sorry, Nee-san, I want Mariya to take a break. You won't mind, right?"

"She is the miko who serves you. Just do as you wish."

Even at the risk of refusal, Godou intended to insist on letting Yuri rest. However, the sworn sister nodded generously. Yuri bowed her head in embarrassment.

"U-Umm... It ought to be time for your hand to... Everyone is watching."

Only after she stammered did Godou realize. His hand had been touching the Hime-Miko's forehead the entire time.

He frantically withdrew his hand. Although he worried whether his sudden act of impropriety would displease Yuri, her face was red for reasons apart from the fever and she also seemed a bit happy.

"My, how sudden the changes some people undergo, Godou. Even the act of holding my hand used to make you so flustered."

"In the end, his female relationships have successfully progressed by making the most of uncorrected mistakes..."

"Although it's a bit inappropriate to say this, but Ena feels a bit jealous of Yuri!"

Erica remarked with displeasure, prompting Liliana and Ena to concur.

Faced with his companions' reactions, Godou timidly led the embarrassed Yuri over to the sofa and made her sit down.

"...By the way, where did Yinghua go?"

"To scout. I ordered him to 'use your legs and your eyes to find the hiding place of the King of the End, then report to me.' Then declaring 'I shall accomplish this even at the cost of my meager life ,' my young eagle rushed out."

Godou had asked his question to change the subject. The excessively strict master replied immediately.

Lu Yinghua was probably rushing all over the vast Bousou Peninsula right now. Or perhaps, this honorary nephew, an expert in handling delicate situations, was off somewhere at the moment, in search of a chance to slack off.

While Godou was imagining this scene, the sworn elder sister spoke up, completely unaware of her disciple's hardship:

"Speaking of which, how very considerate of you."

"Me? What do you mean, Nee-san?"

"You brought her to serve me in my young eagle's place, didn't you?"

Luo Cuilian's words betrayed her firm belief that she was the center of the world.

Able to interpret everything to her own benefit. Godou followed her gaze to see the "her" referred to by the demonic cult leader—the blonde Italian girl, Erica Blandelli.

"It already struck me on our previous encounter, that Japan's king, Kusanagi Godou, is served by a very thoughtful retainer. Of all the people I have met, she could be considered rare talent with outstanding intelligence. Someone very qualified to be my, Luo Hao's, chamberlain."

"C-Chamberlain?"

"Your Eminence, I am overwhelmed by your kind praise."

While Godou was greatly surprised by the unexpected appointment of duties, Erica immediately bowed her head.

"Forgive my unworthiness, Your Eminence, but if it should please you, I am most willing to offer my services by your side."

"It is agreeable. Girl, if memory serves me correctly, your name ought to be Erica."

"I am most honored that Your Eminence could remember this name of Erica Blandelli's. Pray forgive me for my numerous counts of impudence towards you in the past. How truly impertinent of me."

"Extenuating circumstances. I do not mind."

Erica did not fear this self-unaware tyrant, Her Eminence Luo Hao. Rather than extreme deference, it would be more accurate to describe her as facing off against the cult leader with candidness and polite elegance.

...Despite her opponent being someone who might possibly scold "Insolent!" and order a person's eyes gouged out for making eye contact.

Observing their interaction, Godou sighed "I see now."

Yinghua had reminded time and again that "Master instantly gets angry if she finds our speech lacking in manners, but if one were to treat her with maximum humility and attentiveness, she would also fly into a rage at us for groveling too submissively... It's a total pain."

However, mastery of intricate balance was precisely one of Erica's talents.

The way she was treating an important guest would be a textbook-perfect example of traditional Chinese values. Most likely , Erica's intelligence must have left Godou's sworn sister a deep impression during their previous encounter at Nikkou.

"Lily, may I trouble you to prepare a cup of tea?"

"Y-You want me to do it?"

"Our important guest here could be considered quite powerful even among the Devil Kings, Campiones. On top of that, she is Kusanagi Godou's sworn elder sister as well. Even if it's merely a simple cup of tea, I do hope for her to enjoy flavor of the finest quality."

"Good point..."

Erica was elegantly issuing orders like the queen of a palace.

Despite grumbling nonstop, Liliana still walked over to the full set of prepared tea ware.

As a result, the staff standing in a line on the observation deck clearly breathed a sigh of relief. They were relieved that they no longer needed to serve the demonic cult leader with their lives on the line.

...Naturally, there were no accommodation facilities built on this observation deck.

Accommodating the stay of a VIP here was quite inconvenient. The staff on stand by were trying their hardest to provide her with every convenience possible.

The only lucky thing was that Luo Cuilian was someone who made her residence in a convent deep in the mountains to begin with.

She did not seek livability or comfort in her accommodations. In contrast, she would be greatly concerned about "location and style worthy of her identity and stature." The advantage of Japan's tallest structure proved to be quite effective as a means to placating her demands.

Ten-odd minutes later...

Godou and the others began to drink black tea.

The one sitting at the place of honor in leisurely composure, alone on the sofa, was naturally Luo Cuilian.

Seated on the sofa on the right was the sworn brother Godou with Yuri. On the left sofa was Erica, named directly by Her Eminence.

Liliana, Ena and Amakasu remained standing on the side.

This was the observation deck 350m above ground. Furthermore, winds were particularly strong today. Let alone the floor, even the Skytree itself was creaking. However, not a single person cared.

Something far more dangerous was wandering somewhere in Japan right now.

"Actually, I heard Lucretia-san mention this before. If the true identity of the 'King of the End' could be found, my—Verethragna's—sword can become more powerful than normal."

Godou spoke slowly.

He also repeated the hint of "Once upon a time, at a certain place—" from Lucretia Zola.

"This is the standard opening line in Japanese legends. But there are far too many folk stories... I really wish we could figure out which legend it is."

After listening to the highly uncertain news, Amakasu was muttering to himself.

"The core legends related to heroes of steel would mainly include demonslaying tales such as Momotarou, Kintarou, Shuten-douji... If we also consider other demons and spirits, there's also the Fire Man *hyottoko*, the One-eyed Monk *hitotsume-nyūdō*, the Mountain Hag *yama-uba*, the Heavenly Dog *tengu*..."

Able to list out a whole series of candidates in spite of that, the special agent's breadth of knowledge remained impressive as ever.

According to him, legends possessing the vital elements of demons, mountains, fire, one-eyedness, one-leggedness not only originated from towns and cities but also in the oral traditions of the iron-smelting populace living deep in the mountains as well as mining populations.

"A hero of steel is the personified existence of an 'iron sword.' I'm guessing that this legend came from some tribe holding knowledge and skills related to iron."

After listening to Amakasu, Liliana entered deep thought as well.

"The 'King of the End' who remains shrouded in mystery so far, his characteristics include: using a bow, wandering at length. Legends along the same lineage are widely spread east and west throughout the Eurasian continent, its source seeming more likely to be Asia rather than Europe. And considering the connection to Japanese folklore... This is getting more and more intractable."

"Then there's the oracle Yuri received."

An evil dragon in the sea. The dragon summoned wind and clouds to blot the sky and sun. Lightning flashed to illuminate the sea. The king shot an arrow, piercing the dragon's chest—

Ena recited these verses before throwing a glance at the grumbling master ninja.

"Hey Amakasu-san, can you remember what book you read this passage from?"

"No, I'm very sorry. I might've been mistaken."

At this moment, a text message alert was heard. Ena's cellphone .

Seishuuin Ena normally cared little for this tool of modern convenience, frequently leaving it uncharged.

"Oh, it's Shihoko from Kamakura. Wonderful, she'll reach Tokyo Station soon."

"You deliberately called the Hime-Miko of Sagami over too? Forgive me for being rude, but under the current conditions, it's not like she can help much, right...?"

Amakasu commented to Ena who was checking her cellphone text. However, the Hime-Miko of the Sword simply smiled.

"Don't worry. Shihoko is planning to use an 'anonymous' spirit power on you, Amakasu-san."

Suddenly hearing his own name, Amakasu was so startled that he fell backwards a little.

This did not seem like a usual reaction from the agent who had failed to be of help this time. Godou felt slightly puzzled.

"What kind of power is it?"

"Shihoko is currently the only Hime-Miko capable of using it. It's a special spirit power for manipulating and rewriting someone's memories. Apart from rewriting, it could also be used to search someone's mind, to locate past memories that the subject has forgotten—"

"H-Hold on a sec!"

Amakasu interrupted in a panic.

"I recall that there are very few successful cases when using ' anonymous' for memory search! And putting the mind through this and that, there's a possibility of causing memory disorders in the subject!"

"How knowledgeable of you, Amakasu-san. However, the probability is only about one out of twenty or thirty... It should be fine. Probably fine."

"Please don't expect me to be optimistic about probabilistic effects!"

"But Kaoru-san already agreed."

"Come on, this is something where the search subject's wishes must be considered first. In response to this kind of unreasonable administrative order, I can only protest through unexcused absences at work or by handing in my letter of resignation—"

"The *Sutra of the Six Paramitas*."

While the dispute was heating up, Erica suddenly uttered a few sentences quietly.

"An ancient Buddhist text... The *Sutra of the Six Paramitas*. This is one of the stories collected within it. When an evil dragon appeared at a certain kingdom in the past, 'the king shot an arrow, piercing the dragon right in the chest'—There is also one theory that the king was the noble and virtuous reincarnation of a bodhisattva..."

Under everyone's gaze of surprise, the blonde girl spoke lightly.

As a mage hailing from a prestigious house, Erica Blandelli was a genius who had received an elite education.

However, she was born and raised in Milan and should not have memorized Buddhist classics from the orient. Just before Erica spoke, the peerless beauty on the adjacent sofa, whose smile was worth countless riches, had apparently motioned with a nonchalant wave of her hand before whispering a few words to Erica.

Right now, these quiet words spoken by Erica consisted precisely of the knowledge imparted by Her Eminence, the valorous and intelligent Luo Hao.

Part 3

Ākāśagarbha's Esoteric Doctrine Method.

This was one of the mystic techniques practiced by Luo Cuilian. Practitioners gained complete mastery of the contents of Buddhist texts, memorizing each and every word after a single reading.

This was a spell for obtaining superhuman memory by chanting the Ākāśagarbha's incantation with single-minded devotion.

"A book recording a dragonslaying story identical to this passage... To my knowledge, there is only the *Sutra of the Six Paramitas*. Unmistakably."

"The same technique that Grand Master Kuukai was rumored to have mastered? Nothing less expected from Her Eminence..."

After hearing Luo Cuilian's assertion, Ena could not help but feel surprised.

Godou felt the same way. Even when not in peak condition after depleting her *qi*, Luo Cuilian was still displaying many kinds of outstanding talents. All one could do was feel awed and impressed.

Furthermore, Godou felt quite surprised about the fact that this story originated from Buddhist literature.

"I was thinking this kind of scripture only recorded Buddhist doctrine or proverbs. I didn't know there were legends and myths too."

"From the standpoint of cultural diffusion, Buddhism was perhaps quite a powerfully influential tool."

Showing off vast knowledge at this time was still Amakasu again.

"Using the opening line of 'This story happened in the past'—myths from all over Asia were turned into Buddha's proverbs and recorded. In fact, that's how many Buddhist texts were written."

"There are that many?"

"Yeah. And don't forget that in the ancient world, the status of Buddhism used to be quite different from now. Everyone would study it with extreme fervor."

Quite happily, he revealed his knowledge. As usual, another Amakasu Minute started again.

"For example, after the Three Kingdoms period and the rule of the Jin Dynasty in China, it became the era of the Five Ethnicities and the Sixteen Kingdoms—the rise of kingdoms ruled by equestrian tribes. A tumultuous period of war far surpassing that described in the Records of the Three Kingdoms. Towards the end,

it produced a yearning for inner tranquility which became the prevailing tide in mindsets. Back then, the various kings of violent military states conferred respected status on Buddhism, a foreign religion, thus Buddhism was spread and promoted everywhere all at once."

"What about Japan?"

"In Japan's case, Buddhism arrived together with advanced technology from the continent and was seen as advanced religious ideology and knowledge. The educated and privileged classes, taking great pains to bring in Buddhism, did not disappear rapidly either. Those among the Japanese who were educated in Chinese culture were also able to read and interpret Buddhist texts from China that had been translated into Chinese."

Amakasu continued at a faster pace.

"The 'King of the End' probably originated somewhere in Asia. His myth first began as a pan-Eurasian hero's legend, spreading east and west throughout the continent in altered forms through the movement of trade and migration. Then proceeding from there , it became known to educated people in various Asian nations in the form of a Buddhist parable, spreading even farther with minor amendments to the foundational elements of his myth. It's possible that his story is rooted even more deeply all over Asia than we imagine..."

Amakasu was gradually sinking into his own world. However, no one stopped him.

If the truth could not be seen instantly through spirit vision as usual, then the correct answer would only be found through intelligence and knowledge. Furthermore, perhaps...

Perhaps right now, Amakasu was the closest person to the answer—

"Let's organize the key points. He is the man who vanquished dragons or demon lords. The vanquished targets could also be substituted with monster or evil ogres. There's also the wandering part—He's a traveler. No permanent abode... Or perhaps he was in the middle of a journey to some destination..."

While listening to his monologue, Godou suddenly noticed.

At some point in time, Luo Cuilian had started to gaze at the face of the knowledgeable special agent who was often playing dumb.

"The goddess Circe said he was related to the Argo's genealogy. Traveling on that ship was a group of heroes who had set off to sea in search of a golden fleece. They were seafaring adventurers. Heroes on a sea journey. An evil dragon in the sea. Buddhist texts. Chinese books. Spreading to Japan. Vanquishing ogres. The island of ogres. In other words, if that's the case..."

Then after several minutes of deep thinking...

Amakasu Touma spoke a name quietly.

It was Godou's first time hearing this name. Erica, Liliana, Yuri and Ena did not seem to have a clue either. Perhaps it was not a particularly famous character.

However, someone nodded solemnly.

"I see, it is precisely as you say. I agree wholly."

Standing at the pinnacle of wisdom and martial might, Her Eminence Luo Hao approved.

"It is a massive embarrassment seeing as I, Luo Hao, should not have overlooked this hero's name. However, you, too, definitely possess a pair of eyes with outstanding wisdom. —Erica."

"How may I be of service, Your Eminence?"

"Bestow upon him a reward in my name. His accomplishment is worthy of commendation."

"Understood. Your will shall be done."

After replying tactfully, Erica smiled and winked at Amakasu.

"Amakasu-san, it's time for me to offer you praise of the highest level. To receive a personal commendation from Her Eminence herself, it could very well be a once-in-a-century feat?"

"Well, umm, I'm truly overjoyed."

Towards being praised, Amakasu reacted with a bitter face instead.

"Although Her Eminence has offered her approval, this might sound weird coming from me, in the end, we still lack conclusive evidence. This is different from Yuri-san's spirit visions."

"Indeed. And it is not limited to the inability to confirm the name."

This time, it was Liliana's turn to murmur with a troubled look.

"There are still many incomprehensible aspects to the 'King of the End.' The overwhelming power from the great ritual of the covenant. The duty of exterminating all current godslayers. These are characteristics that none of the other gods share. I think that... Just figuring out his name is not enough to get a clear picture of his true identity."

Perhaps this was a hint from spirit vision.

After listening to the discussion, Godou made his decision.

"In the end, the best method is still to go get confirmation."

"Your Majesty, where are you going to confirm?"

Ena asked in dumbfounded surprise, prompting Godou to answer:

"Have you forgotten? Your grampsy—Susanoo in the Netherworld—and his gang should know the true identity of the ' King of the End.'"

"Oh, that's right. But they surely won't tell."

Speaking of interacting with a god, there was no one closer than this Hime-Miko. She immediately asserted:

"The true name of the 'King of the End' definitely cannot be disclosed to humans. The top secret belonging to the realm of the gods. Although grampsy seems very easygoing, he is also a proper god. He's very strict in this area."

"Fair point. If the name could be revealed, I'm sure Athena would have said it long ago."

Godou agreed with Ena's correction, but changed the direction of the conversation.

"However, at Susanoo's place, I've actually met someone else apart from a certain god, multiple times. I have a feeling that... this person might tell me. Of course, this is the one point that's the most impossible to prove."

The princess in the Netherworld whom he had met several times, led by mysterious fate—

For some unknown reason, the view of a grassy plain under the moonlit night was surfacing in Godou's mind together with her beautiful face.

Godou had an impression that he had met the princess with eyes as clear as glass at this location and even listened to the exotic sounding music of a foreign instrument, despite having no idea at all when exactly this scene had happened.

But right now, Godou was filled with confidence.

The Princess of Glass had offered a hint to the true identity of the "King of the End" back then.

Currently, the hero had awakened and he was already prepared to confront this major emergency. If he were to ask her again, perhaps—

Godou said to his companions at hand:

"I need everyone's power to reach that place. Perhaps I might need to trouble Mariya even more, can I rely on you?"

"Y-Yes. Of course there is no problem. So long as it is within my power, I am willing to do anything!"

Mariya Yuri had kept silent until now.

This was partially due to her staid personality in addition to her high fever. However, it looked like she had been listening seriously to everyone's discussion. In addition, she instantly understood Godou's invitation and stood up straight away.

Just at that moment...

"Ah..."

Yuri grew unsteady on her feet and immediately fell down again.

Part 4

Waking up, he found a yellow flower in full bloom in front of his eyes.

It was supposed to be winter at the moment, yet spring had already arrived prematurely at this mountain in the wild. Realizing this fact, the pale-haired aristocrat—the one known as the "King of the End"—smiled.

Last night, he had fought Kusanagi Godou and his sworn elder sister, even going as far as to use the great ritual of the covenant.

Afterwards, he had left the devastated crater and come here.

To wait for the heat from his entire body to dissipate, he had leaned against a random tree, falling asleep while holding the Divine Sword of Salvation against his chest.

Wandering nonstop throughout his entire life, he had also spent long periods in uninhabited places.

He did not mind sleeping in the wilderness like this at all. In addition, there was a lovely sea of blooming flowers the moment he opened his eyes. This was a pleasure of nature one could not experience when sleeping on a soft bed in an opulent palace.

In the depths of the Minamibousou mountains, being able to admire early blooming rapeseed flowers in the latter part of February—

Naturally, he could not have known this type of information.

He was simply admiring this beauty of life, blooming quietly in the mountains of the wild.

"...The heat has pretty much dissipated."

While sleeping from last night till now, the heat had almost subsided completely.

Nodding, the "King of the End" stood up and walked through the field of yellow flowers. He was just about to get a closer look at the loveliness of wild flowers when—

"Alas."

He lamented in sorrow.

Instantly, the yellow rapeseed flowers withered.

A sudden heat wave had incinerated them utterly. In an instant, they were sucked dry of life and moisture.

—There was no turning back. Shaking his head, he resumed walking.

The grassland wilted from simply his footsteps. Just the act of passing by was making trees loose their vitality, turning into dry and withered wood.

"I must hurry..."

Currently, the "King of the End" was reaching critical point in heat and power.

Things would be bad at this rate. Just as what had happened many times in the ancient past, numerous calamities were going to bring harm to this world soon...

To be precise, his name was the "king manifesting at era's end."

The man who descended upon the end times when many godslaying Rakshasa Kings vied for supremacy, thereby pacifying the world.

Although that was significance carried by this name, he understood very well. His existence itself could very well be the trigger for "the end of the world."

To prevent this conclusion, there was only one solution.

Namely, by paying each of the present generation's godslayers a visit, to engage in deathmatches repeatedly. That was all.

"Godou-san, today's weather feels much warmer, does it not?"

"Definitely. It's only February yet it already feels like spring."

It was the evening after Godou had met his sworn sister at the Tokyo Skytree.

Godou and his companions were visiting the Sayanomiya mansion. Instead of the usual study, they were meeting in the guest room so as to let Yuri sleep comfortably after collapsing from her fever.

Liliana and Ena were by the bedside, accompanying the sleeping Hime-Miko.

Godou and Erica were standing face to face with Sayanomiya Kaoru in the center of the guest room, a couple steps away.

"Actually due to the Siberian cold front, considering the distribution of pressure zones, today is supposed to be the coldest day for the Kantou region all winter."

"..."

"In spite of that, the actual weather turned out to be this warm. I have also received reports of a persistent rise in Tokyo Bay's water temperature. On the same day, Yuri also started having a fever."

"Well, I think Yuri simply collapsed from exhaustion."

After Kaoru, it was Erica's turn to speak.

"If only it were coincidence. But just an hour earlier, the Witenagemot at Greenwich—Princess Alice also sent a notice."

"From Princess Alice?"

"The princess had been tracking Divine Ancestor Athena earlier, coming to Asia from Europe. And tonight, she originally planned to visit us here... But she was forced to abort."

Erica's expression clearly increased in worry.

"Hey Godou, you remember her secret, don't you?"

"That one, right? When going out, Alice-san always uses the spell of spirit body separation."

"Yes, likewise for her expedition to Asia this time. While her physical body sleeps in the Greenwich residence, only her ectoplasm flies out here. However, her body was suddenly struck by high fever..."

"Like Mariya!?"

"Just as a precaution, her ectoplasm returned to the body to check out the situation for now. However, the princess left you a message."

Erica showed her cellphone's LCD display to the surprised Godou.

A text message was shown. The part written in Japanese was probably meant for Godou. As expected of the Duke's daughter who was highly accomplished in linguistics.

'Fire and wind are the precursors to calamity. Please pay attention to unusual changes in the ocean and the earth.'

"..."

This warning came from the Miko-Hime in possession of spirit vision powers. Kaoru spoke to the surprised Godou:

"According to Amakasu-san, this basically means wind gives rise to fire while fire melts iron ore in turn. The melted iron forms a sword of steel to conquer the ocean and the earth—The sudden warming and strong winds seem to be the byproducts from the awakening of the 'King of the End.'"

By the bedside, Liliana and Ena were tending to the Hime-Miko , collapsed from fever, while listening intently to the discussion.

The silver-haired knight spoke slowly:

"The princess and Mariya Yuri are both miko who have inherited bloodlines of the Divine Ancestors. They also possess atavistic spirit powers of high caliber. Their bodily changes are also effects of this. Furthermore, Divine Ancestors are reincarnations of mother earth goddesses. In other words, ' daughters of the land.'"

"The closer to their ancestors, the more easily affected by unusual changes in the land, right..."

Ena commented gravely.

Godou nodded in agreement, staring at Yuri who was sleeping on the bed.

"Don't force her to get up tonight. Let her rest like this. Give Hikari a call later."

"Understood. Leave it to me. Speaking of which, Godou-san..."

Kaoru suddenly changed the subject.

"Do you still remember? An earthquake happened during the battle last night."

"Yeah. When the 'King of the End' was using his bow. It stopped very quickly."

Just by summoning the strongest weapon, it shook heaven and earth.

Although it was a bit absurd, this performance did not taint the reputation of the hero of salvation at all.

"Almost simultaneous with the earthquake last night, we confirmed a concerning phenomenon. Perhaps it was pure coincidence, but I've already asked Amakasu-san to investigate."

Speaking of which, Amakasu Touma was not present.

Instead of coming to the Sayanomiya mansion, he had left directly from the Skytree to investigate the site.

"Then, what happened where?"

Just as Godou asked, Yuri moaned from bed.

Godou and Kaoru ended the conversation and looked at the Hime-Miko. Everyone did the same. Under everyone's gaze, Yuri suddenly sat up.

Panting heavily, she looked around her blankly.

"I-It was a dream just now...?"

"Did you see something? An oracle in a dream?"

By the pillow, Ena was already used to this kind of situation and asked Yuri.

Walking to Godou's side, Kaoru whispered in his ear: "Ena is asking if she received an oracle via spirit vision in the dream."

Clearly having woken up from a nightmare, Yuri murmured softly in a weak voice.

"I-I think so. But it was a very terrifying dream..."

It seemed to be something she did not want to bring up lightly.

Yuri remained silent for a while, calming her breathing. Then she looked up with determination and swept her gaze across everyone in the guest room before slowly starting to speak.

"First of all, I would like everyone to watch the scene I just saw."

Crossing her arms in front of her chest in bed, the Hime-Miko closed her eyes.

Clad in a miko outfit, her entire body was giving off white light. This was proof that Yuri had learned from Princess Alice her prided spirit power of psychic sensing.

"I will recreate from my mind the scene I saw in the dream."

The white light of psychic sensing gradually occupied the entire guest room.

In the next instant, the scenery in the room changed. Spontaneously, Godou and the rest found themselves looking down from high in the sky at the magnificent appearance of Japan's prided national symbol, the sacred Mount Fuji.

However, this number one famous mountain of Japan—known visually to every Japanese person—erupted.

The sacred peak of Mount Fuji was spewing flames, smoke, lava and volcanic pellets from its volcano mouth, scattering them all over the ground.

The flowing lava was scorching the mountain's surface, turning into great scorching rivers flowing towards the foot of the mountain.

—At this moment, the scenery changed before their eyes.

Unlike the distinctive Mount Fuji, the location of this mountain range was impossible to tell from sight alone.

This also seemed to be a volcanic zone with pillars of fire spewing from various peaks. The entire mountain range was erupting.

—The scenery changed again.

This time, it was an island. The volcano in the island's center was giving off smoke and lava.

—Then a skyscraper overlooking Tokyo from above. The surroundings were similar to the view they had admired from the Skytree's observation deck during the daytime. But in stark contrast, the volcanic ash fallen from the sky had turned the area all grim and dark. Tokyo was covered in black volcanic ash piled high everywhere.

—The scenery kept changing.

A street scorched by the lava flowing from the lowlands. A town obliterated by fiery fragments. Baptism by fire from volcanic pellets falling on the land like raindrops of a heavy downpour. A sky dominated by black and gray.

—The final view overlooked all the islands of Japan from a great height.

The sky above the Kantou region was thoroughly covered by dark clouds, making it impossible to see the ground situation clearly. This cloud layer was most likely formed from volcanic ash.

Furthermore, this mass of dark clouds was eventually spread over all the islands.

Then the entirety of East Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe was covered in black—

"..."

While everyone was left speechless, the scenery finally returned to that of the Sayanomiya mansion's guest room.

Just as Yuri said, what she saw in her nightmare was extremely terrifying.

"Speaking of which..."

Liliana was the first to start a conversation amidst troubled thoughts.

"Heroes of steel are the sons of volcanoes. The hero Perseus had descended on Mount Vesuvius at Naples, whereas the Great Sage Equaling Heaven also held his magical ritual at Mount Nantai. If

the 'King of the End' were to increase the spiritual energies of fire and wind, causing the ocean and the earth to heat up... It is foreseeable that the volcanic zone will be affected."

"Godou-san."

Kaoru spoke up as well, clearly without her usual carefree airs.

"The 'concerning phenomenon' I mentioned earlier is actually related to volcanoes as well. A number of volcanoes at the Izu Islands are confirmed to be smoking. Volcanic activity in that region is frequent to begin with, hence it was originally thought to be pure coincidence."

Kaoru had also mentioned dispatching Amakasu to investigate as a precaution.

"In any case, investigators will first be sent to the volcanic zones near Kantou. The Izu Islands, the Ogasawara Islands, Hakone and Mount Fuji... But the mountain systems in Nagano, Yamanashi, Gunma, Tochiki, Fukushima are essentially linked with volcanoes.. ."

After witnessing the ominous vision of the future, Godou sighed. The commotion related to the "King of the End" was evidently heading towards "a world crisis like every time."

"However, the enemy this time is incomparably stronger than all previous others."

No matter what, the decisive battle against the Devil King exterminating hero was gradually approaching.

Godou nodded at his companions. In any case, he had to make a trip to the Netherworld first. Proper preparations must be made for this now.

Then a few hours passed.

Kusanagi Godou was stepping into the domain of the Netherworld again after a long absence.

This was a mysterious domain providing a view of unbelievable scenery every time. As previously, Liliana had opened a portal using witchcraft. Godou passed through the portal and again, he saw scenery that could not possibly exist in the surface world.

He was currently in the center of a sea.

However, the water was red, as though a red tide outbreak had occurred in this entire region of the sea.

The only thing that could be called land was the small island where Godou was standing. Expressed through sensibilities of the mundane world, its area was the size of a convenience store.

Looking into the distance over the sea, some kind of viscous fluid could be seen floating occasionally among the waves.

One of the two accompanying him, Seishuuin Ena, spoke quietly.

"It feels like the primordial sea that gave birth to the islands of Japan and the Leech Child."

"I remember it was the myth where Izanagi and Izanami stirred the ocean to create the islands, right?"

Recalling vague memories, Godou replied.

However, these whereabouts were not important. All he needed to do was to imagine the destination in the Netherworld clearly and they would be able to teleport there instantly.

Nevertheless, Godou lacked talent in this critical aspect of imagination.

Hence, apart from Ena who was used to the Netherworld, another expert was accompanying him.

"Mariya, how do you feel?"

"Do not worry. It does not feel that unpleasant—No."

In the Netherworld, the strength of the mind and the ectoplasm was more important than that of the physical body.

As that was the case, Yuri with her powers of spirit vision and psychic sensing was actually the most dependable here. Hence,

Godou still hoped that someone like her could accompany him, in spite of the fact that she had her eyes closed due to high fever and illness.

One additional reason was that Yuri herself wished the most to accompany him in the face of an unprecedented crisis.

"It would be better to say that I feel more at ease after arriving in the Netherworld. Please do not worry."

Indeed, her face had improved in color.

She did not seem like she was overexerting herself. Indeed, this was a world where burdens on the mind and ectoplasm were more important than the physical body's. Physical illness was easily compensated for by strength in spirit powers.

As a side note, both Hime-Miko were dressed in miko outfits.

On this expedition to the Netherworld, they had also put on upper garments known as the *chihaya*, similar to the haori. It was like wearing an additional layer of clothing when going outdoors in winter.

Since Yuri was fine, Godou suggested:

"Then let's set off. Try finding Susanoo first."

"Then Ena and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi will lead the way... But can Ena ask a question first?"

Godou was taken aback by the sudden question.

Uncharacteristically, Ena was timidly stealing glances at Godou's face. This behavior was totally unlike that of the cheerful and lively Hime-Miko of the Sword—No wait.

On the subject of "male-female relationships" that was not her forte, she would act especially meek and cautious.

"The person who will tell you the true identity of the 'King of the End'... It's a woman after all, right?"

"!?"

"Ah, just as suspected."

"I-I didn't say anything!"

"Even if nothing was said, it was written on your face. Looks like Ena was right."

Ena answered a little sadly in a small voice and secretly sighed.

"As expected of His Majesty. Despite being together with a number of girls, he still manages to get familiar with someone whom neither Ena nor the others know..."

Leaving behind Godou who was faltering from the sudden questioning, the other Hime-Miko also sighed.

Naturally, this was Yuri who had been suffering from high fever until just now.

"It is just as you say, Ena-san. In fact, I have suspected in my heart as well, whether the one we are about to meet would be a woman or not."

"C-Could you two stop talking about this like it were problematic behavior!?"

While Godou was feeling inexplicably distraught, he heard the sound of a zither.

A leisurely melody. The performer was not nearby. This tone color sounded like it was transmitted from across the vast sea.

The instant Godou heard this music, he remembered everything .

A night with a waxing crescent moon. Back then, the Princess of Glass had played the same tune.

"Mariya! Can you fly us to where the music is coming from?"

"Yes, very well!"

Sensing Godou's serious attitude, Yuri instantly shelved the subject from just now and closed her eyes to concentrate.

A moment later, the two Hime-Miko and Godou found themselves on a plain somewhere.

It was night. Apart from the crescent moon, there was nothing else of note. Silver grass was growing everywhere, reaching human height.

A woman's enchanting singing voice could be heard in the distance together with a zither's notes.

In yonder days, there was an evil dragon in the sea. The king immediately drew his bow and shot an arrow, wounding the dragon right in the chest—

Godou and company nodded at one another, walking towards the singing voice.

After walking twenty or thirty meters, pushing through the grass, they reached a clearing. A beautiful woman dressed in *Juunihitoe* was sitting there with her back against a tree trunk lying horizontally on the ground.

Beautiful long hair the color of flax. Clear eyes the color of glass.

On her lap was an ancient trapezoidal zither. Both the instrument and the performer were clearly not from Japan.

"Rakshasa King, you have finally arrived here by your own will. Also, the Japanese miko who have inherited my blood."

Godou inquired the smiling Princess of Glass:

"Now that you mention it, then the reason why we are here—"

"I already have a basic idea."

As expected of the princess living in the alternate dimension resembling the great spiritual realm.

That made things easy to explain. Godou spoke the name that Amakasu had told the group.

"My friend guessed that this might be the true name of the 'King of the End.' But what is it actually?"

"..."

The Princess of Glass put her zither away and stood up lightly.

She was clad in an ornate and heavy *Juunihitoe* kimono. However, the graceful Princess of Glass walked over to Godou as though her clothing was weightless.

This too was probably part of the Netherworld's mysteries, where mental strength transcended physical laws.

Currently, the beautiful Princess of Glass had walked over to in front of Godou.

"Kusanagi-sama. Will you make a promise with me in return for the answer?"

"Promise?"

"Indeed. Even after learning of the crown prince's true identity and destiny, you must still engage His Highness in a battle of life and death, and destroy him. You must avenge our ancestors, the goddesses."

Just as Godou was surprised by this radical request, the Princess of Glass drew close to his face unexpectedly, kissing him on the lips.

"Your Majesty!?" "Godou-san!?"

Watching this scene silently till now, Ena and Yuri were shocked as well.

Naturally, this was a kiss performed to cast a spell on a Devil King Campione. Godou's consciousness rapidly left him...

Part 5

How many godslayers had been born in the world in the past?

Godou did not know the answer. There were times when none appeared for two or three centuries while five or six of them could suddenly be born in the same period.

And right now, in the time period the Princess of Glass was showing him through the [Spell of Visions]—

This was also a "terrible era" when many godslayers were strutting across the earth.

Currently, the life of one of these godslayers was playing in Godou's consciousness like a dream or a historical film.

He was the godslayer who had defeated "the demonic deity with ten lives" and usurped his opponent's authority.

His trusty sword and armor were made of bronze instead of iron. Evidently a man of the ancient world. The time he lived in was even earlier than Uldin's.

Like other godslayers, "the godslayer with ten lives" was also a powerful king.

Apart from fighting Heretic Gods, he also conquered a number of cities and countries, a man of power, ruling over many nations as a great king.

The residents of all the neighboring countries feared him, calling him the "Devil King who could slaughter even the gods."

However, he had a mortal enemy as well. A hero who had appeared in an opposing country. The rumored holder of the " destiny of exterminating all Devil Kings in the world." When the hero descended upon the earth, the populace not only worshiped him as a war god but also made him their great general.

This hero was troublesome as an enemy, but quite a worthy challenge.

Not only did he possess enough valor to threaten the "godslayer with ten lives," but he also resurrected no matter how many times he was defeated, rising to challenge the Devil King again each time .

Were this godslayer not in possession of the "ten lives" authority that made him approach immortality, surely he would have died in battle.

In any case, the situation was a stalemate even though the Devil King held the overall advantage. Hence, the human priests supporting the hero's side held a ritual.

This was the ritual for summoning a "goddess of the land" to serve the Devil King exterminating hero.

"Although I bear no grudge against her, I can't ignore the one she serves. To prevent loose ends, I'd better kill her."

After hearing about the goddess-summoning ritual, the Devil King intruded into the ritual grounds.

However, it was all over already. The beautiful goddess had descended successfully. The priests who had carried out the ritual all cheered and rejoiced.

True to his title of Devil King, he first slaughtered every one of the priests.

Then he raised his sword against the goddess who had manifested on earth and was supposed to assist the hero.

"O King of the Rakshasa, it cannot be helped if you desire to kill me. Please do with my life as it may please you."

The goddess answered quite candidly.

"What?"

"Just as you can see, I will not strike back."

She had long flaxen-colored hair and eyes the color of glass. Despite manifesting as such a beautiful maiden, she remained still with her head bowed down, exposing her delicate neck to the Devil King.

Never expecting her to be so submissive, the Devil King felt his mood getting ruined. At this time, the goddess with eyes of glass spoke calmly:

"Frankly speaking, I was summoned only to sacrifice my life to His Highness—the crown prince. Even if you refrain from the deed, someone else will most likely kill me."

His Highness, the crown prince. She was referring to the Devil King exterminating hero.

The people serving that man had addressed him that many times.

"How incomprehensible. If you're going to summon a goddess, at least order her around as a retainer. What good will killing you do? I really don't get it at all."

"Raising the crown prince's divine power requires the essence of the earth... In other words, an earth goddess' life."

Still with her head bowed, the goddess smiled, further enhancing the beauty of her face.

She was smiling to hide and suppress her sorrow. That was the kind of smile it was.

"Because His Highness is the enemy of goddesses—of women. More than anyone else, he embodies this characteristic of sword gods, that of 'the man who conquers the earth,' a great hero."

"Hmm."

He fell into deep thought. It was necessary to confirm the veracity of her claim first.

But if it really were true, killing her would be the same as personally aiding the hero. He wanted to avoid this. More importantly—even if the goddess was lying—this was the most interesting plea for mercy he had ever heard.

"Very well. Then you shall come with me. As my captive, your life will be in my hands. If necessary, I will protect you from their blades."

"Ah."

The goddess with the eyes of glass chuckled as though she had heard something amusing.

"What's so funny?"

"Nothing. The Rakshasa King with ten lives capturing a goddess of the land, then facing off against the crown prince... It's like we have returned to the age of the myths."

Then several years passed—

The hero led his army, laying siege to the castle where the Devil King with ten lives made his residence.

The hero and the Devil King's armies clashed violently. During the chaotic battle, the one-on-one showdown between generals also started.

The godslaying Devil King and the Devil King-exterminating hero each drew their sword for a decisive duel.

Using the weapon known as the Divine Sword of Salvation, the hero controlled countless bolts of lightning. Locked in a duel with this formidable enemy, the powerful Devil King must also pour his entire power into the battle to resist him.

Hence, he did not have any strength to spare for defense. He failed to defend the Devil King's castle from an arrow.

Amidst the chaotic battle, the younger brother who served the hero had bided his time to shoot this arrow. As the hero's subordinate god, the younger brother was identical to the hero in appearance except with brown skin.

Shot by the arrow, the Devil King's castle exploded like a volcanic eruption.

All soldiers and retainers, as well as the goddess with eyes of glass living somewhere in the castle, everyone was incinerated to nothing in the exploding flames, dying in futility.

"What!?"

Compared to the Devil King, the hero turned out to be more shocked.

The younger brother had probably acted on his own without consent. To ensure the goddess' death, he had even used an arrow of massive firepower. Furthermore, he achieved his goal successfully.

Together with the goddess with eyes of glass, the Devil King's castle was utterly annihilated. In the next instant, there was a bright flash of lightning.

This was life essence from the deceased mother earth goddess in the area. The essence was automatically drawn to the hero's body, raising his power as the "king manifesting at era's end" to a critical state.

At this moment, the Devil King swung his trenchant blade.

At critical state, the "King of the End" did not evade. The sword chopped down mercilessly.

However, what bled out from the wound was not blood but extremely powerful lightning.

The lightning of salvation. Causing Kusanagi Godou great hardship during battles in the future, this platinum-colored light exploded, sweeping everything away within a radius of ten-odd kilometers—

"Alas."

The "King of the End" concentrated all his regrets into this brief sigh and lamentation.

His divine power had destroyed everything. Whether the Devil King's castle or army, or even the army he was leading as the hero.

He had not hoped for this atrocious violence.

However, this tragedy was undoubtedly caused by him, the hero.

Due to the powerful explosions of lightning, all life had been erased in the surroundings of the Devil King's castle, turning into a barren wasteland.

The hero—the "King of the End" simply stood in shock in the middle of the wasteland.

He was clearly exhausted and troubled by the sins he had committed, tired of the destiny forcing him to do such things, thus losing color and brightness in his handsome and proper face.

"How boring."

The only survivor, the Devil King, arrogantly struck up conversation with the hero.

The hero looked back abruptly. While feeling surprised, he nodded in acceptance of this fact in the depths of his heart.

"Nothing less expected from you... Of all the godslayers I have known, you are the larger-than-life character closest to immortality . It is unbelievable how you survived the lightning I released after the great ritual of the covenant had raised me to the highest level."

"But it wasn't easy either."

The godslayer with ten lives was extremely resilient in vitality. Thus the Devil King narrowly survived.

Looking at the Devil King, the hero laughed coldly. This laugh expressed how surprised but impressed he was towards the absurd toughness of the human before him.

"I was thinking that the goddess—who used to be my wife—would be safe under your protection... How disappointing."

"Don't go starting wars near people whose death will cause a ton of trouble. It's such a pain for me too."

While the hero sighed, the Devil King simply responded indifferently.

"You piss me off quite a bit. Although I don't bear any particular grudge against you as a man, I do have many complaints for the 'destiny' giving birth to your kind of existence. Like 'A hero who devours the lives of women should just drop dead!'"

"...Should I express deep agreement?"

"The same goes for you. If you find destiny to be a hassle, just abandon it and be free, okay? There's no need to keep shouldering it like an obedient slave. It's such a sad sight."

"I suppose one could say that after all."

Confronted with the Devil King venting on his own, the "King of the End" smiled, feeling impressed.

"Destiny, fate, bloodline, divine protection, duty, faith, the limits of the human body, helplessness, a power gap meant to be impossible to overcome... You godslayers always seem to break past all obstacles effortlessly, blocking my path, even defeating me a number of times."

Smiling, the "King of the End" offered praise to Devil Kings before reaching for the Divine Sword of Salvation.

He readied the sword in an upper stance towards the godslayer with ten lives.

"So, whenever I am fighting your kind, I always offer the deepest of respect."

"Respect from the enemy only makes me uncomfortable. It's time to start."

Leaving this remark behind nonchalantly, the Devil King transformed.

His authorities were not limited to just the one with ten lives. Shapeshifting into a giant evil dragon with wings was another of his authorities.

Then the "King of the End" summoned his ride from the Divine Sword of Salvation.

This was an aerial chariot drawn by a pair of flying steeds. Riding his chariot, he began an aerial duel against the Devil King who had turned into an evil dragon.

Having absorbed a mother earth goddess' life, the "King of the End" was at critical state—

Purely in terms of combat ability, magic power, divine power and number of weapons, he actually surpassed the Devil King by far. Based on the gap in specs, there was no way to call this a duel in the first place.

In spite of that, they still began an intense battle to the death.

The ability to put in their full effort to find chances of victory no matter how powerful the enemy...

This was common to all godslayers—Rather, their survival instincts would produce maximum effect at times like these. Furthermore, due to a certain factor, the Devil King enjoyed an unexpected advantage.

The Devil King and hero fought in the air, the sea then finally began another battle on land again.

However, they were still unable to reach a conclusion. Flying into the sky again, they finally broke past the atmosphere, continuing their battle in space.

"Uwoooh!"

"Ohhhhhhhhhhh!"

Finally, the two of them crashed to the ground.

Both of them were severely injured, unable to fly again.

They had fallen onto a small island in the South Seas. Here was a flourishing jungle with a beach of beautiful white sand. Here, the Devil King with ten lives finally exhausted his powers and perished.

Having depleted his entire life force while in the shape of an evil dragon, he was lying on the beach.

A moment later, the gigantic body turned into white bones, rendered a wordless corpse.

Meanwhile, the "King of the End" also lost his life. After dying, he returned to the divine blade's form. The platinum blade's cutting edge was almost completely curled and even bent in an L-shape.

The divine sword lay pitifully on the beach.

Swallowed by the waves breaking against the beach, the sword was swept into the ocean.

But two years later, the Divine Sword of Salvation revived again as the "King of the End." Eradicating all the other godslayers in the era who still remained after the "Devil King with ten lives," this was the mission entrusted to the pale-haired hero.

Part 6

A great battle between the hero and the Devil King had taken place in the past.

Godou was watching a vision of the battle as though he were in a realm of dreams. When the two combatants ended their match in a double knockout, Godou suddenly woke up to a start.

"This place seems to be..."

Looking at the surrounding scenery, he was greatly surprised.

In the beginning before seeing the vision, he was in a moonlit wilderness. However, his current location seemed to be a beach on a small island. After walking forward a few steps, he entered a primitive jungle with flourishing trees.

This was where the ancient Campione and the "King of the End" had met their mutual defeat.

Furthermore, the Princess of Glass was standing ahead of him. In addition, the two Hime-Miko who had accompanied Godou from the mundane world—Yuri and Ena—were both watching Godou with worried looks.

After nodding to his two companions, Godou faced the Princess of Glass again.

"You... are the Divine Ancestor reincarnated from the goddess who was killed back then. Is that right?"

"Indeed. My life was forfeited and taken away as nourishment for the crown prince."

The beautiful princess with flaxen-colored hair and eyes of glass spoke quietly.

"After being reborn as a Divine Ancestor, I went through a journey of wandering and came to Japan. Leaving behind the bloodline where the ancestors of those miko arose... Finally, I grew tired of life in the mundane world and chose to live secluded in the Netherworld."

The Princess of Glass was actually the distant progenitor of the Hime-Miko.

Since Godou had expected this already, he simply nodded lightly in acknowledgement.

In fact, whenever Yuri showed signs of atavism, her hair would often turn flaxen in color.

"Originally, Divine Ancestors would not retain the memories from their time as goddesses. But after coming to the Netherworld and opening the sealed door to the past, I remembered what had happened in my previous life."

"I see."

Pallas Athena had also recovered her memories as Athena.

The same phenomenon had occurred to the Princess of Glass too. As Godou nodded, the princess asked him:

"Then Kusanagi-sama, what are your plans regarding the prior promise?"

"You mean destroying the 'King of the End'? That promise—of course I can't do it."

Godou answered simply.

"That guy is stronger than me far too much. Given an opponent like that, I can't guarantee victory for certain. Also, I'm a pacifist as well."

"..."

"Those gods are extremely powerful. As the battle intensifies, things could end quite tragically. I don't think deciding to 'kill' or ' destroy' from the start will work."

"In that case, are you saying you do not need to know the crown prince's true name?"

"Well about that, you still intend to help me out no matter how I answer, right? Otherwise, you wouldn't have told me so much."

Godou deliberately spoke in an assertive tone of voice.

Somehow, he had a feeling about an idea he wanted to try out. Then a smile surfaced on the exquisitely shaped lips of the Princess of Glass, who proceeded to nod.

"Even when confronted with the crown prince's power and the pain from fighting His Highness, you have not wavered from your own conviction at all. Truly remarkable. If I may be frank—"

At this point, the princess smiled mischievously.

She often displayed facial expressions and mannerisms very similar to a living woman's.

"I have said this to the Old One, Susanoo, and the high priest many times in the past. That Kusanagi-sama is rather similar to the

godslayer who caused the crown prince the most grief—His Highness with the ten lives. Consequently, when an emergency arrives, destiny ought to be entrusted to Kusanagi-sama."

"Huh? Why can't I see any similarity between myself and that guy at all?"

Having watched the ancient Campione's life through the vision just now, Godou immediately rejected the idea.

"No. In terms of being considerate to women, offering compassion to the goddess despite being enemies, hence shouldering unnecessary hardship, you two are quite similar."

"Haah."

The princess had tactfully dismissed Godou's protest. She continued:

"However, that sort of consideration also brings many rewards. Kusanagi-sama, it is precisely the reason why I concluded you have the capacity to cause the crown prince pain... So please confirm carefully for yourself the true name of the 'King of the End .'"

Sudden praise. Godou went "eh?" and stared at the princess' beautiful face again.

"This domain is sealed inside the main hall of Plutarch's Residence, where the records of the 'King of the End' are kept safe. Now that you are here, you should be able to see His Highness' true name and origins."

A beach in the ancient past was where the hero and the Devil King had reached mutual destruction.

The current location was a Netherworld domain constructed to be identical to that place. The riddle's answer sought by Divine Ancestor Guinevere, Alexandre Gascoigne and others was sleeping here—

Without knowing it, Godou's side had been guided to this treasure of an island.

While Godou was feeling surprised and Yuri and Ena were bowing their heads politely, the Princess of Glass suddenly disappeared along with her glamorous *Juunihitoe*-clad figure, departing from the scene.

"Plutarch's Residence where the Akashic Memories, the source of all spirit visions, are kept... This place does feel similar to that sanctuary last time."

Yuri was speaking softly in a pious tone of voice like a shrine maiden kneeling before a deity.

Placing a hand against her lovely bosom bulging under the miko outfit, she closed her eyes and concentrated. Next, stone

tablets emerged from various places in the beach of white sand where the three of them were situated.

These square slabs of stone were roughly forty or fifty centimeters in length.

Long passages had been written on the surface of the stone tablets in an ancient alphabet.

Emerging from the sand like germinating plants, the number of stone tablets most likely exceeded five hundred.

"Do all of these stone tablets contain information about the ' King of the End'...?"

"Indeed. Once you acquire the knowledge here, the Sword's spell words can surely be forged..."

The weapon for slicing apart the hero shrouded in heavy mystery.

The opportunity to obtain this weapon had finally arrived at Kusanagi Godou's side. However, it was not possible to decipher and memorize all of these documents that had been written in an unknown language.

The only way to do it was to rely on Mariya Yuri's spirit vision and spells to impart the knowledge—

Just as Godou intended to walk over to Yuri who was fidgeting from shyness...

"A-Are we starting, Your Majesty?"

Ena asked.

"Basically, umm. Ena also finds it quite indecent to make such a request, but..."

"What's the matter, Seishuuin?"

Ena was stammering, showing hesitation unlike her usually personality as a free-spirited child of nature.

Finding her acting strange, Godou inquired.

"Ena also... wants to carry out the ritual together. The ritual to pass all kinds of knowledge to Your Majesty—"

"!?"

"E-Ena-san, what are you talking about!?"

In other words, the three of them doing it together—naturally, Godou was not the only one feeling surprised but Yuri was greatly stunned as well. However, the Hime-Miko of the Sword still continued shyly.

"S-Sorry. Ena will be left out at this rate, only to watch from afar ... This makes Ena very sad..."

Indeed, the ability to extract Akashic Memories was limited only to outstanding users of spirit vision.

Naturally, this arena would be dominated by Yuri alone. However, that would mean excluding Ena, leaving her all alone.

If possible, Godou still wanted to treat his companions equally, these companions who had supported him through thick and thin —

Godou believed that sincerely. Precisely because of that, before using common sense to reject this highly problematic proposal after contemplating various considerations, he felt his heart waver somewhat.

(I see, Seishuuin also—)

Naturally, he glanced at the other Hime-Miko.

Yuri was acting flustered from her childhood friend's request, unsure how to answer.

"N-No matter what, to make the outrageous proposal of three people engaging in this kind of behavior, that would be far too shameless. W-We ought to show more restraint—"

Face completely red, she protested. However, Yuri stopped mid-sentence.

She must have recalled how "this kind of behavior" had already taken place many times already. Also blushing intensely from embarrassment, Ena then brought up *that*.

"Y-Yeah. Ena had a feeling Yuri would say this. B-But at Nikkou and Gaul, we already did that kind of thing many times already. This time as well—Ena wants to proceed as in the past..."

"Th-That really should not be how the issue can be settled."

"You're right... Ena is truly sorry for saying such willful words. Ena did not mean to trouble you, Yuri, but Ena wanted to make a request no matter what..."

The normally lively and cheerful Ena was hanging her head sadly. She must have realized she had said something very willful.

"E-Ena-san."

Yuri quietly and sorrowfully called out the name of the Hime-Miko who had backed down with forthrightness.

She was wavering inside, unsure whether to obey her sense of shame and common sense or to prioritize her dear friend's feelings. Furthermore, if their places had been swapped... Perhaps she might be thinking about the same matter too.

Godou reached out and embraced the distraught Hime-Miko in his arms.

"Mariya, I've got the same request for you."

"Godou-san!?"

Hugging the hesitant Yuri tightly, Godou continued at the same time:

"I feel really bad about pushing troublesome tasks on you all the time, but I'm very sorry, it looks like I'll have to continue being a good-for-nothing who does nothing but stupid things."

"Indeed you are right. Godou-san and Ena-san are always saying unreasonable things."

Yuri's body was only stiff in the very beginning.

Immediately, she relaxed in Godou's arms and entrusted her weight to him. Very likely, she had been searching for an excuse to relent as well.

Due to Godou's 180cm stature, the two of them had quite a large difference in height.

Stooping lower, Godou brought his face near Yuri's lips and said:

"If you dislike it, just shove me away immediately."

"I shall not... do that. Although I honestly feel that you are someone who always makes things difficult for others, I am the one who promised to spend my life with you... However."

Simply by conversing in whispers, they could feel each other's breathing.

This intimate sense of distance was only possible precisely because the two of them had promised their minds and bodies to each other.

"I shall have to make you spoil me next time, understood?"

"Of course you can."

Inspired with a sense of tender affection by Yuri's rare request to be spoiled, Godou began to kiss her.

Yuri received Godou's lips in ecstasy. After a while, she opened her lips and called out to the childhood friend who had been watching them with an uneasy expression.

"Ena-san too... Come here."

"Certainly!"

Yuri's invitation was this brief probably due to embarrassment. However, Ena rushed over to their side with vigor as though she were flying.

"Now it is time to start gathering the knowledge about the 'King of the End.'"

With Yuri's announcement, the surroundings suddenly changed . The hundreds of stone tablets embedded in the sand started to float into the air one after another.

In response to that, Yuri's eyes shone with glass-colored radiance.

"The king manifesting at era's end... The heavenly child sent to the earth to exterminate the sinful Devil Kings, the sleeping tiger lurking in the human realm, the bow-using hero shouldering the fate of wandering—His Highness' name is hereby received without a doubt."

Declaring softly, the Hime-Miko reached towards her friend.

"Please also accept the wisdom I have obtained, Ena-san."

"Yes!"

The two girls clasped their hands together tightly. At the same time, Ena's eyes also shone with glass-colored radiance.

Yuri was using the spirit power of psychic sensing to share the knowledge regarding the "King of the End."

Then the ritual of instruction finally began.

"Godou-san. The goddess Circe had mentioned on her dying breath. The 'King of the End' is an existence linked to the genealogy of what is known as the Argo in Greek mythology."

"Traveling on this ship were dozens of heroes with Heracles first and foremost."

Ena continued quietly immediately after Yuri.

Welcoming the two girls to his bosom, Godou sat cross-legged on the white beach. Hence, the two Hime-Miko followed, sitting down respectively on Godou's left and right sides. At the same, they leaned themselves tightly against him as well.

The warmth and suppleness of the two maidens' bodies were being transmitted through the chihaya and the miko outfits.

Smooch... Godou lightly kissed Ena who was on his right.

"A certain member of the passengers was the 'King of the End'—That was not what she meant. The most crucial fact here, is what kind of ship the Argo was..."

At first, it was just a light touch on the lips.

But by the second kiss, Ena was already pushing her lips tightly against him, then timidly, she inserted her tongue which Godou received in turn with his own tongue.

Between the pair's lips that were intimately pressed together, the two tongues tangled with each other.

After enjoying this intimate contact, Ena released his lips and it was Yuri's turn to kiss him.

"Setting out from a Greek port, the Argo sailed for the Black Sea, reaching the coastal kingdom of Colchis. What the band of heroes sought was the kingdom's golden fleece, their national treasure—Using guile in addition to valor, the heroes finally succeeded in stealing the fleece..."

"Then boarding the Argo, the heroes escaped from the kingdom of Colchis."

"Namely, attacking another country after a sea voyage, plundering treasure to return to their homeland in triumph—the adventure of the Argo was a myth originating from a story of invasion and piracy across the sea."

"The important element here is that of the 'invaders who traversed the sea.'"

"Have you noticed it? Actually, this legend follows the same structure as the tale of Momotarou circulating in Japan."

"In the ancient past, Momotarou sailed out to Onigashima to vanquish the evil ogres living on the island, finally returning to his hometown with plundered treasure, yes? Ultimately, this was also a story of invading pirates..."

While weaving spell words as usual, Yuri continued to work her tongue carefully and nimbly.

Pouring in thoughts and loving feelings that were more delicate than bold, she allowed her lips and tongue to moisten inside his mouth and licked attentively. Ever since his kiss with her back in June last year, Yuri's heart had gradually and spontaneously filled with sincere feelings of offering herself to no one but Godou.

Influenced by her childhood friend's behavior, Ena gradually lost the stiffness in her motions.

When Yuri's lips let go, it was Ena's turn to seal Godou's lips, using her relaxed tongue to engage nonstop in a passionate kiss. In addition, with eyes of intoxication and fervent gaze, she stared at Godou.

The trio's feelings and behavior were escalating without impedance, finally entering the official ritual—

This was the same development as usual. However, just as Godou was thinking that, Yuri's breathing suddenly quickened.

"Mariya?"

"S-Sorry. I suddenly feel out of breath..."

Not only Yuri but Ena beside her was also panting.

In addition, the two girls were leaning against him from both sides, entrusting their exhausted bodies to Godou for support. Frantically, Godou held the two Hime-Miko, feeling surprised.

Their entire bodies were unbelievably hot. If one were to measure their body temperatures with a thermometer, it would most likely show forty degrees centigrade or above.

"The secret of the 'King of the End,' sealed away for over two millennia... Of all the spirit visions imparted so far, this one is the hardest to endure."

"A-After all, this is knowledge determined as taboo by the gods, Yuri."

Ena replied to her childhood friend who was moaning in pain.

"Although we are miko who have gone through training, we are humans with lifespans after all... Unless we proceed with caution, our minds and bodies won't endure—"

Evident from this advice alone, she truly lived up to her name as the premier Hime-Miko who was accustomed to dealing with gods.

Furthermore, Ena whispered while closing her eyes. Hence, the glass-colored radiance residing in her eyes began to envelop her entire body faintly.

Then burying her face into Godou's chest, Ena said softly:

"Y-Your Majesty, it's fine now, continue the ritual? A-Also, although it's okay to kiss on the lips like earlier... Ena hopes you can kiss somewhere else too."

"What!?"

"I-If the knowledge is left to remain in our heads as in the past, it will place a very heavy burden... Can try moving it to the body."

"You can even do something like that!?"

"After all, this is the Netherworld. Because this is the domain where thoughts and spirit rank higher than the body and matter, so this sort of thing is still possible."

"B-But, what you mean by kissing somewhere else is—"

"Y-Yes. All kinds of knowledge will be transmitted as usual just by kissing other parts of Ena's body. If you don't end the ritual quickly using this method, Ena and Yuri probably won't last to the end. Might collapse before all the knowledge is imparted..."

Covered in faint glass-colored light, Ena whispered these words .

Burying her face in Godou's chest, she even pressed her extremely well-developed bosom tightly against him. But ultimately, she could not muster much strength.

Godou immediately kissed Ena's smooth neck and even licked with his tongue.

Instantly, vivid images surfaced in his mind. It was the "King of the End" kneeling down submissively with his head bowed to be crowned. The one crowning him was an old man dressed in crude clothing. Probably a monk or a priest.

"Ah—Your Majesty, did it transmit?"

"Yeah, no problem. This method works."

"Th-Then please. Kiss Ena even more—Ooh mmm!"

While Godou slid his lips and tongue along the neck down to the shoulder, Ena's body suddenly began to shudder. It was as though her entire body had grown quite sensitive.

Perhaps by watching her fellow Hime-Miko, Yuri grasped the technique as well.

Letting the pale glass-colored light envelop her entire body, Yuri said to Godou:

"I-I am fine now. So definitely, Godou-san, I can help—Ooh mmm!"

This time, Godou kissed Yuri's earlobe.

This was the same act he had performed in passing during the knowledge ritual in the past, prior to the duel against his sworn elder sister, Luo Cuilian. In fact, he had memories of kissing Yuri in that spot many times since then.

The gentle Hime-Miko was expressing a sensitive reaction like before—No, it was even more sensitive this time.

The ritual continued with force and vigor like raging waves in a storm.

Induced with burgeoning passion, Godou continued to kiss the two Hime-Miko deeply and heavily without resting.

Using his lips to kiss those lovely earlobes, pale necks and slender fingers, he even kissed their fingertips tenderly.

His tongue moving along their necks to the vicinity of their voluptuous bosoms, he used the tip of his tongue to carefully examine and confirm the soft tenderness of their skin.

Subconsciously, the two girls had already removed their chihaya over their miko outfits, even opening up their upper garments. However, none of the trio minded at all.

Furthermore, Yuri and Ena were not just passively accepting kisses.

Whenever they noticed Godou's lips departing, the girls would immediately bring their faces close to him, kissing nonstop.

"Godou-san. The sword for slicing apart the great hero, the most authoritative in the orient..."

"Now is precisely the time to master it. As long as it is for this purpose, Ena and Yuri can do anything..."

There were times when Yuri and Ena took turns in kissing him with other occasions when both girls kissed Godou's lips at the same time, offering kisses of intense passion.

Thanks to that, Godou would occasionally act out in excessive fervor.

Allowing his tongue to slide along their backs, down to their waists, or even kissing their pale thighs or the like, that was going way too far no matter what. However, the ritual of excessive passion was taking full effect, filling Godou with an astounding volume of knowledge inside.

In addition, Godou could finally feel certain.

Given his current self, he was now capable to slicing *that man* with the sword of spell words—

Inside Godou's mind, he was no longer that whatever "King of the End." His true name and origins were already known. All information about the hero was clear to him now.

It turned out to be the same hero as the name speculated by Amakasu Touma.

With expressions of rapture, Yuri and Ena gazed at Godou. As for the red flush surfacing faintly all over the two Hime-Miko's bodies, that was the afterglow lingering from the ritual for obtaining this name...

Chapter 5 - You, the One Shouldering the Fate of Eternity

Part 1

"There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another."[1]

"There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead."[2]

The two knights, Erica Blandelli and Liliana Kranjcar, were cooperating on a task together while chanting spell words at the same time, for the sake of accomplishing *a certain magic*.

Their location was the garage of a detached home in the Bunkyou Ward where Liliana made her residence.

The garage was large enough to park two large vehicles but neither Liliana herself nor her maid and housemate Karen Jankulovski could drive, hence the garage was merely an unused space at present.

"It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body."[3]

Erica was chanting spell words for metal manipulation magic.

Placed in the center of the garage, the object made metallic clanging noises with splashes of scorching sparks, meanwhile changing its form slowly.

After all, this type of work was not quite suited to undertake at home.

This was iron alchemy, the magic for manipulating iron and steel. Erica's area of specialty.

"And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible.."[4]

Liliana was also using witchcraft.

Through the passage of time, women who served as priestesses for mother earth goddesses became known as "witches. Hence, users of witchcraft were experts skilled in the manipulation of earth spirits.

On the other hand, iron was the symbol of harm to the earth. Digging the earth required hoes crafted from iron. Chopping down trees required axes of iron.

As the incarnation of iron swords, the heroes of steel seized nations through martial valor, annexing land. Defeating the dragons and snakes controlled by the earth mothers, they turned goddesses of the land into their wives and lovers.

—Consequently, compatibility was very poor between Erica's iron alchemy and Liliana's witchcraft.

That being said, the two of them were melding magic from two different systems together, like mixing water with oil, cooperating to create *a certain object*.

The slightest mistake and this magic would fail.

Furthermore, the spell would still fail even from merely irregularity in breathing or instability in magic power.

This was a task of extreme difficulty. Completing this project without issue in spite of that, this stood testament to Erica and Liliana's skills as prodigy level.

"It has finally taken form. It should be fine as long as it accomplishes the effect."

"That would be Godou's job, not ours. This is as far as we can achieve within our power."

The two Great Knights conversed while looking at the center of the garage.

Placed there was a short sword, whose blade measured 50cm or so in length. The blade's color was dull like lead and inscribed with the words "the one who is, and who was, and who is to come. "[5]

This was the magic sword they had just forged using a number of magical ingredients.

The ingredients used were respectively: a former iron sword that was now a piece of metal all covered in rust, a pottery fragment unearthed from ancient Libyan ruins, salt, mercury, a blue lump of solidified lava, etc.

Made in an emergency rush after all, this sword would probably last for no more than one or two uses. However, that ought to be sufficient.

Ever since Kusanagi Godou and the two Hime-Miko departed last night, the two knights had been working nonstop on this task without resting.

Fortunately, it was Saturday so they did not need to be excused from school.

"I wanted to go along to the Astral Plane originally..."

"No helping it. Although it doesn't matter who are the ones making this, you and I are the most adept, after all."

"It does not seem like your personality to accept things so readily."

"Oh my, didn't you know that I am the woman who can sacrifice everything for Godou any time? But now that you brought it up, Lily, aren't you the one who is accepting things with unbelievable readiness?"

Erica put the lead-hued short sword into a leather sheath and placed it on a table in a corner of the garage while Liliana cleared away the fragments of ingredients leftover from the forging magic.

While their hands were working away, the two girls started testing each other.

"Lily, lately it has come to my attention that you haven't shown the slightest hesitation towards becoming Godou's woman."

Erica was still speaking with a noblewoman's elegance as usual.

"Stealing credit whenever certain circumstances arise to allow you time alone with Godou, having tasted pleasure and satisfaction multiple times, your heart has grown confident... Perfectly spot on, am I right?

"You are the one I must denounce, the sly vixen through and through."

Liliana did not change her strict demeanor of a female knight's either.

"Absolute refusal to miss any opportunity. The recent visit to Sardinia with Kusanagi Godou was a rare and excellent chance. Precisely because you accomplished results accordingly, that is why you are so calm—Am I right?"

The two girls have always been prodigies from magic associations in Milan as well as childhood friends and rivals.

Although they were in the same faction now, they were still competing against each other over the man of their most beloved affections. Staring into each other's face, they observed the other's reaction for now.

In the end, they both sighed and slowly relaxed their shoulders.

"Regarding this matter, Kusanagi Godou really ought to be questioned thoroughly. There should be quite a lot of new information of interest."

"Indeed. After all, he is not one who can keep secrets."

After exchanging nods, Erica continued:

"When suspicious points arise in his female relationships, those are generally discovered after something happened."

"This type of premonition always comes true. After all, he is someone impossible to predict. Most likely, the ritual will be completed in the Netherworld this time as well."

Criticizing Kusanagi Godou was their shared special talent.

To go even further, they were much better at it than Yuri and Ena with their benevolent personalities. Although their king was kind and a bit dense in personality, he was excessively problematic on the matter of conduct.

"Actually, Erica, judging from common sense, I would expect Mariya Yuri to be the partner... But this alone is probably insufficient to satisfy him."

"What a coincidence. I happen to agree with you completely."

"More than becoming undisciplined, lately his mind has gradually decayed."

"However, do note that we are the accomplices in this regard."

"In a certain sense, the people responsible for him awakening into such a monster are the four by his side—us..."

"For him to have developed to such an extent, how unexpected. Or rather, a godslayer never fails to impress."

Just as they really got into the topic, delving deeper and deeper into the matter, Liliana's cellphone on the table in the corner started ringing.

The caller was Sayanomiya Kaoru, presumably to inform them of an emergency gathering.

The two Great Knights nodded at each other.

A few hours after the forging magic's success, it was two in the afternoon.

Erica and Liliana were heading to the mountains in the Bousou Peninsula again. But instead of Minamibousou, this time it was Ichihara City in the Chiba Prefecture. Their current location was near the Ichihara Service Area of the Tateyama Expressway crossing the mountainous Uchibou region.

The History Compilation Committee had reported discovering the "King of the End."

Arriving in the car provided by the Committee, the two Great Knights were greeted at the scene by Lu Yinghua.

He was probably conducting the search operation together with the History Compilation Committee in order to accomplish the task set by his master.

"Oh well, finding that guy isn't actually hard."

Saying that nonchalantly, Lu Yinghua frowned. The arrogant youth's handsome face was casting a grim gaze towards withered trees.

"It's obvious from first glance, because there are suspicious trails left all over the place."

"The land becomes barren wherever the 'King of the End' passes ... Is that what is going on?"

Liliana murmured with worry.

The Bousou Peninsula's mild climate meant that its mountains and forests were full of greenery even in winter.

One could even call it early spring by February. That being said, the mountains near the Tateyama Expressway had already lost their verdant color.

Leaves were withered while trunks and branches looked dead as though dehydrated.

Trees were literally standing there with all greenery and nourishment sucked out of them. The weeds growing under the trees were not only withered but also pulverized and destroyed.

The soil was dry as well. Due to the strong wind today, clouds of dust were blown all over the place.

Fortunately, this was not the state of the entire mountain. Only the area from the foot to the middle of the mountain had lost its greenery.

"Looks like this guy walked here on foot from Minamibousou. Everywhere he passed through looks like this. All the grass and trees are withered, looking like a single lane's worth of tire tracks."

"Indeed it is so..."

Liliana nodded in response to Lu Yinghua's report. Before arriving here, she had used the [Witch's Eye] to confirm the surrounding situation.

Looking down from above, it looked like a faded one-way road had been marked on the Minamibousou landscape.

As though the grim reaper's carriage had left these tracks behind, it was a terrifying scene.

"On the other hand, there are many golf courses nearby and a small number of homes, isn't that right? Is it possible that the 'King of the End' has not made any contact with humans?"

"Well, about that... I think it'd be quicker for you to have a look."

Puzzling Erica with his answer, Lu Yinghua motioned with his chin.

The noise of engines kept coming from the direction he indicated.

This noise from operational engines was clearly different from that of vehicles traveling on ordinary roads and highways. Quite distinctive. There was a motor racing circuit behind the mountain they were at.

Although called a racing circuit, this place was not as grand as Formula One venues or the like. This place was exclusively used for training, shows and official competitions for kart racing.

That said, the course length was roughly a kilometer.

With a 160m main straight, it was quite a large facility.

A number of teams were practicing today. Several karts were speeding along. There were also people watching from the grandstand. The pit area also had staff at work.

A quick glance of the surroundings revealed roughly thirty or forty people present.

The surprising thing was that the "King of the End" was mixed among the crowd. Unbelievably, he was sitting at the front row of the grandstand, watching the racing karts going at high speed.

With a serious expression on his face, the sacred aristocrat was staring at the rapid vehicles with thunderous noises.

This could be described as the graceful and noble airs of " royalty whose curiosity was piqued when confronted with rare and unusual tribute or offerings."

Furthermore, he was even chatting with the people beside him.

After listening to their answers, he would nod with a look of comprehension. A crowd gradually gathered around the "King of the End" in the grandstand. In addition, they were explaining all kinds of knowledge to the Devil King exterminating hero, offering snacks and drinks to him, gazing into his handsome face in a trance.

As a side note, the "King of the End" was dressed in the same attire as he was last seen.

A blue tunic and a white cape. Taken down from his back, the scabbard carrying the divine sword was stood up next to him.

The handsome face with its pale complexion was clearly not Japanese. Despite this appearance of his, none of the surrounding people were bothered at all.

"That's essentially the attitude this great hero takes towards humans."

Lu Yinghua explained.

Erica and Liliana were watching the "King of the End" from afar , at a corner of the grandstand.

"He apparently came into contact with seven or eight people during the last two days. When Committee members asked around, everyone replied saying they 'met a very handsome foreigner who was extremely friendly.' Also, they all spoke with a face of rapture, hoping sincerely to meet him again."

"A hero who makes contact with ordinary humans huh..."

Liliana remarked with mixed feelings stirring inside.

"Even in this regard, he is quite an exception among Heretic Gods."

"Also, he is probably the same as Madame Aisha. I believe he possesses a charm authority."

Currently, all those people were treating the "King of the End" with sincere well wishes and admiration.

Having witnessed the same scene many times in ancient Gaul, Erica pointed out this fact.

"Try imagining this, a virtuous and revered king who could be called a bodhisattva's reincarnation. Or rather, it would be more apt to consider him the originator. If he were to visit heavily populated urban areas—"

"Undoubtedly, he would cause massive chaos just like the Madame in ancient Gaul."

"Unbelievable. By gathering fanatical believers, he could probably turn them into his own army. Even with a gentle disposition, he is also a god with unpredictable effects..."

"Well, my two Nee-sans, about that..."

Lu Yinghua interrupted the conversation between the two Great Knights.

"Are we really going to make a move? There is the option of staying hidden to continue monitoring, right?"

"You definitely make a good point. But even if the charm authority could be released, I believe the 'King of the End' must not be allowed to enter cities. If he were to run amok as before, none could predict the extent of damage and casualties..."

"Also, Lu Yinghua, you still have your master's orders."

"In that case, I've no objections to raise."

The trio nodded at one another. Resolving themselves, they started to move.

They walked from the corner in the grandstand over to the circle of people that were gathered around the "King of the End." Squeezing through the entranced crowd, they approached the hero of salvation.

The trio were the only people gazing at the pale-haired aristocrat with calm eyes. Presumably because of that...

He evidently figured out their identities. With a calm voice, he called to the people around him.

"My apologies, everyone, but let us call this a day. I hope you will depart as quickly as possible to leave me alone. Thank you."

The effects were immediate. The people around him packed away their things quickly and left the seating area, disappearing towards the exit.

Also, there was a lot of human noise at the race course and the pit area.

Originally driving smoothly, the karts stopped to pit in, one after another. The drivers got out of their cramped seats while the crew waiting at the paddocks also began preparations to withdraw .

But unlike the spectators at the grandstand, these people were showing displeasure and agitation in their words and behavior.

The History Compilation Committee had contacted the racing circuit's management for an emergency shutdown today (possibly using magic in the process as well).

Glancing sideways at the people leaving, the "King of the End" stood up.

Turning his dignified and handsome face towards Erica, Liliana and Lu Yinghua, he slowly walked over to them.

"You are affiliated with the godslayers of the present generation—Kusanagi Godou and Her Highness Luo Hao, aren't you?"

Part 2

The History Compilation Committee and Lu Yinghua had discovered the "King of the End."

He was finally found at a certain place in the Bousou Peninsula that apparently served as his residence.

After receiving this report, Erica and Liliana went over to meet Sayanomiya Kaoru at her mansion first.

As one of the leaders in charge of the Committee, Kaoru remarked with distress.

"Despite all kinds of uncertainties, let's continue monitoring him for now while waiting for Godou-san's return."

A compromising solution one could hardly find fault in, but it had its own problems.

The "King of the End" was traveling north from the Bousou Peninsula, reaching Ichihara in the Chiba Prefecture.

Earlier, he was apparently moving through mountainous areas. But after crossing the Ichihara Service Area and Prefectural Route 13, his location was already within the municipal region of Ichihara City facing Tokyo Bay. Going north slightly would be Chiba City, the heartland of the Keiyou Industrial Zone.

Also, going west would bring him to the twenty-three wards of Tokyo after passing through the cities of Narashino, Funabashi and Ichikawa.

If the "King of the End" were to choose this route, he would be invading the Greater Tokyo Area where Japan's population and building densities were the greatest—

"Her Eminence Luo Hao isn't in peak condition, so this could be described as the worst scenario. It would be best to avoid making reckless moves. Better err on the safe side for now."

This sort of cautious and meticulous approach did not seem like the sophisticated Kaoru's usual style.

She was probably aware of it herself. A rare look of worry was displayed on her face.

There were other uncertainties as well. If the "King of the End" were to start a fight in the Greater Tokyo Area with such immense destructive power—damage and casualties would surely result on an unimaginable scale.

In the end, this strategy of caution carried its own risks.

However, there was no other solution. With heavy hearts, Erica and Liliana made a visit to the Tokyo Skytree, in order to report the situation to Her Eminence Luo Hao.

The highest authority right now, Her Eminence Luo Hao—was hidden from sight.

With bamboo curtains set up in a corner of the observation deck , she was staying in a barricaded space.

"I am currently practicing some slightly complicated *neigong*. These measures are for eliminating unnecessary disturbances. You too, be careful and absolutely do not approach me."

The two Great Knights were left speechless by these orders that she had issued from behind the bamboo curtains.

Without a direct view of Her Eminence Luo Hao's beautiful appearance, Erica reported what had transpired.

Direct conversation with Her Eminence Luo Hao would be too heavy a responsibility for History Compilation Committee members and Lu Yinghua's subordinates. This was why Erica went out of her way to come here.

"Hmm... How incomprehensible."

After listening to the report, Her Eminence Luo Hao murmured in bemusement.

Was it due to the *neigong* she was practicing? Her voice sounded slightly more high-pitched than usual.

"Why do you not kneel down and prostrate yourselves towards this Luo Hao in supplication? To swing the iron fist of punishment upon the hero who is bringing harm to the world."

" "....." "

This inconceivable comment made Erica and Liliana at a loss for words.

"Naturally, there is no value in saving the decadent city of Tokyo. Be that as it may, seeing as it is the land where my sworn brother makes his stronghold—It would be a taint upon my honor as the sworn elder sister if I were to fail in displaying my chivalry."

"Do you mean to imply you will protect this country's people in Kusanagi Godou's stead?"

"Hohohoho... The real event will wait until that child returns. On the level of stalling for time, I shall have a little fun in the meantime."

The demonic cult leader smiled tenderly from the depths behind the bamboo curtains in response to Erica's question of confirmation.

Even when facing a god—be it the strongest sword god—she never altered her haughty downward gaze. But given her current state of depleted magic power, was she able to oppose the "King of the End"?

Erica did not inquire upon this matter.

If she were to raise the question, Her Eminence Luo Hao would assuredly end up feeling angered and insulted.

Even without being Lu Yinghua, Erica could easily predict such an outcome.

If she were to insist on stepping on the tiger's tail, what awaited her would be nothing as gentle as the fist used for punishing her direct disciple.

Completely unaware of the thoughts going through Erica's mind, Luo Cuilian continued:

"First, you shall make contact with the 'King of the End.' Then inform the hero of my impending entry to the field. Make him wary to a certain extent."

There was no choice but to obey this command.

Hence, this was how things developed into the two Great Knights facing off against the "King of the End" at a motor racing circuit in the mountains.

"You are affiliated with the godslayers of the present generation—Kusanagi Godou and Her Highness Luo Hao, aren't you?"

"Precisely. Are you looking for our lord, Your Highness?"

Naturally, the first to answer the Devil King exterminating hero was Erica.

She was often the wise one, acting as spokesperson on behalf of her faction. This talent did not fade at all even when confronted with gods or Devil Kings. Ever since becoming Kusanagi Godou's knight, this talent and disposition of hers was naturally honed more and more.

"Yes. Somehow I had the feeling that I would meet him eventually if I walked to this area. Now that his messengers have come forward, this guess seems to be correct."

This was most likely a supernatural sense obtained as part of the destiny of exterminating Devil Kings.

The "King of the End" smiled at Erica, Liliana and Lu Yinghua before declaring:

"Originally, I should be the one sending an emissary. However, the Wind King—the one who serves this role—currently needs to keep a low profile. Hence, I have decided to search for the various godslaying kings on my own."

"Why would you... May I ask for the reason?"

"Naturally, to challenge them."

Despite his calm tone and attitude, this was a stern declaration.

"If permissible, I do wish to pay them each a visit at their castle or residence. To enter a duel. Seeing as he has intentionally sent messengers to come forward, it means that your lord shares the same sentiments, doesn't it?"

"....."

Instead of answering immediately, Erica contemplated swiftly.

As suspected, was he approaching Tokyo with this purpose in mind? Going north towards Chiba City from the southern part of the Bousou Peninsula. As soon as she heard about the "King of the End" advancing in this direction, Erica already guessed this possibility.

Going north another five or six kilometers from here would reach Ichihara City.

Even if he went west instead, that would take him to the urban area of Kisarazu City.

This racing circuit was located in the middle of a mountainous area with an bewildering number of golf courses. Population density was low as a result. Evacuation was accordingly easy. If possible, Erica hoped to stall the "King of the End" in this vicinity. Then the rest depended on Her Eminence Luo Hao—

Phew. Erica exhaled slightly.

Bridges shall be crossed when they were reached. Furthermore, Kusanagi Godou's sworn elder sister was absolutely not someone who would insist out of vanity that they were able to do something when they could not. She possessed ability and insight matching her level of pride.

"In that case, our task ends here. Our lord will probably give a direct answer."

"Direct?"

Seeing Erica look into the sky, the "King of the End" followed.

It was a sunny winter's day. The wind continued to blow strongly. A bird of prey in the sky—a goshawk—was gliding with regal solemnity. This species made its habitat in forests near cities in the Kantou region.

However, the power and acuity overflowing from those wings and eyes could not possibly belong to a bird.

Landing next to the "King of the End," the goshawk transformed at the same time.

"Procrastinating what ought to be finished, that would be called slothfulness, wouldn't it? I, Luo Hao, am fully prepared to accept your challenge."

"Ah."

Descending from the sky as a goshawk, she landed gracefully with outstanding movements of *qinggong*, the art of lightness.

Confronted with the demonic cult leader's unique entry to the stage, exhibiting extraordinary Daoist and martial arts alike, the " King of the End" nodded in admiration. Nevertheless, the reason he felt impressed was not due to her superlative landing skill.

He was moved by Her Eminence Luo Hao's appearance.

Her dazzling, otherworldly, beautiful face was still akin to a celestial maiden's. Such beauty was enough to call the greatest treasure of the mortal realm. Moreover, this face was quite young.

Her stature was more petite than before whereas her face and body had clearly regressed in age.

Despite a true age over two hundred years, she looked like a teenager. Instead of her earlier Han clothing, she was wearing a sleeveless mandarin gown with a slight slit on the side of the skirt.

Demonic Cult Leader Luo Cuilian had descended from the sky in this form.

"This appearance... Was it for healing injuries sustained in our previous battle?"

"Hohohoho. Seeing as there was a need to recover excessively depleted *qi*, for the first time in a long while, I trained in the *neigong* of [Absolute Supremacy Peerless Across the Universe]. Although the price I paid was a slight shortening of limbs, this constitutes no inconvenience in engaging you in combat."

Declaring boldly, Luo Cuilian's vocal pitch was higher than usual, a young girl's voice.

Meanwhile, Erica and Liliana were greatly surprised by Her Eminence's appearance whereas the demonic cult leader's direct disciple simply went "oh dear" and shook his head.

"I remember it's a training technique that allows *qi* to recover with frightening speed. So this was what Master has been practicing these few days..."

Qi was magic power in the first place and had to be gradually accumulated through *neigong* training for days on end.

However—Lu Yinghua explained. If Her Eminence were to use this [Tianshan Tonglao Technique][6], she would be able to rapidly gain *qi* comparable to two months of training. However, the price paid was temporary age regression...

"But that *neigong* is apparently quite a pain to use, so it's totally an emergency technique."

Indeed, the *qi* in Her Eminence Luo Hao's body had recovered substantially.

However, the sum total was clearly still less than usual. In addition, physical stamina and arm strength were naturally going to be weakened for a little girl's body. It was possible that her martial arts could not be applied with full freedom as before.

That being said, for her to surmount an overwhelmingly unfavorable situation so effortlessly, amazing feat would be the only proper description.

The hero and the Devil King finally met again at this mountainous racing circuit.

Fortunately, through the History Compilation Committee's efforts and the "King of the End"'s own authority, ordinary people had left the premises completely.

The two of them jumped down lightly to the course from the grandstand where Erica and the others were.

"My sworn brother Kusanagi Godou will make a tardy arrival due to certain reasons, but... Of course, you are free to summon your subordinates. I, Luo Hao, shall take on all of you as opponents."

"Now that you have said that, I cannot call upon them lightly."

Smiling wryly at the demonic cult leader's taunt, the hero drew out the Divine Sword of Salvation.

"Before he arrives, I shall fight using this sword alone."

"Hohoho. In that case, I shall temporarily seal away my palm techniques—unsurpassed by any weapon—and fight you with this ."

Despite facing a god for an opponent, Her Eminence Luo Hao did not alter her haughty attitude at all.

Nevertheless, it was perhaps due to a Devil King Campione's nature to live true to themselves. Using a little girl's body, the demonic cult leader clenched her fist tightly and swung it at the " King of the End."

Meanwhile, the Divine Sword Mandala was manifesting above the hero in splendor.

The second round was beginning at last.

Part 3

After Kusanagi Godou finally learned the origins of the "King of the End"...

On a beach in the Netherworld, the two Hime-Miko were panting from the afterglow of the intense ritual, their eyes remaining in a rapturous trance for quite a while.

Suddenly coming back to their senses, they frantically fixed up their miko outfits that had been pulled completely open.

"Although this has been the case since before..."

After sitting upright properly, Ena spoke with an entranced tone of voice:

"Ena and Yuri can no longer marry anyone but His Majesty, right?"

"P-Please do not speak of such things so loudly. We simply took part in a ritual to impart Godou-san with knowledge... Despite the requisite motions—"

Although Yuri was offering a tactful rebuttal, her face was equally filled with happiness as her fellow Hime-Miko's.

On the other hand, Godou could only remain silent without any comment.

His mind was swinging back and forth between resolving himself to never look back versus questioning how things were going to develop henceforth. In any case, towards the kind and gentle Yuri and Ena who could accept a scoundrel like him, he decided he must absolutely repay his debts to them or die trying.

In any case, just as the trio finally regained composure...

"The objective has apparently been met successfully. How wonderful."

Dressed in a *Juunihitoe*, the Princess of Glass suddenly returned.

Smiling at Godou and the girls as though offering her blessings, her expression then went solemn.

"However, the issue is that even with knowledge of His Highness' true name, that alone will not make defeating the crown prince easy..."

"That's right. Just the Divine Sword of Salvation and the bow are hard enough to handle already, yet that guy also has this trump card of the great ritual of the covenant."

Godou expressed agreement. The princess spoke with a pensive look:

"The great ritual of the covenant raises the crown prince's power according to the number of Rakshasa Kings ruling the earth . At least, if the Devil Kings of the present era—all seven of you—were to cooperate, perhaps..."

"That's absolutely impossible."

Campiones did things at their own pace and were impossible to unify. Godou replied immediately.

The kind of relationship between himself and the sworn elder sister was an exception among exceptions. At most, perhaps there was John Pluto Smith of North America. But even so, that was only three out of seven.

"Eh, wait a sec, 'kay?"

At this moment, a diabolical solution flashed through Godou's mind.

Perhaps there was a way to counter the great ritual of the covenant. But after pondering what it was about, Godou was plunged into feelings of self-contempt. He must not resort to that no matter what.

Hence, the Princess of Glass smiled.

"You seem to have some kind of secret strategy. Impressive as always, Kusanagi-sama."

"Oh no, it's very problematic if you say that... Also, there's no time to put it in motion. There's definitely not enough time before the battle against that guy."

"I see."

The princess pondered slightly then extended her right hand slowly. Suddenly, a certain slender object wrapped in purple silk manifested on her palm.

"Allow me to give you this in advance, Kusanagi-sama, for when you have time to put that strategy to use."

"For me, huh?"

Surprised, Godou accepted and confirmed the object wrapped inside the silk. He had recollections of seeing it before. Could this be—? Looking up, he saw the Princess of Glass nodding firmly.

"This is exactly what you are thinking of. If possible, please make use of it."

What amazing clairvoyance. Probably a Divine Ancestor's spirit senses in action.

Godou decided to accept the item first and placed the bundle into his pants pocket.

"It's time we returned to the world. Thank you for taking care of us in many ways."

Bowing his head in gratitude to the Netherworld benefactor, Godou called to the two Hime-Miko.

"Everyone on the other side must be very worried. Let's hurry back to reassure them. Mariya, can you lead the way for the return journey?"

"Of course. However... Godou-san, may I make a request?"

With a solemn expression, Yuri spoke:

"I wish to stay over here in the Netherworld."

"Huh?"

Godou felt surprised. On the other hand, Ena seemed to have realized the reason.

"Oh, it's your health, Yuri, isn't it?"

"Indeed. Even if I returned to Japan now, I will still be unwell due to His Highness' influence. In that case, it would be better for me to remain in the Netherworld, allowing my spirit senses to stay sharp and observe the situation on the ground. This way, I will still be able to provide assistance to you, Godou-san..."

Currently, both Hime-Miko already knew the true name of the " King of the End."

Even so, Yuri did not say the name. To reveal the name of the hero known as the strongest of steel, it was ultimately taboo for a miko.

But how was she going to help while remaining in the Netherworld?

"Fortunately, I still have this power right now..."

Yuri looked across the water into the distance.

This was the place recreating the beach where the duel between the godslayer and the hero had taken place.

The grains of sand were bright and white while the seawater was a vivid light blue. Images appeared on the surface of this beautiful sea, apparently a racing circuit somewhere on earth.

The Divine Sword Mandala had manifested high in the sky, raining lightning down on the ground.

A twelve or thirteen-year-old girl bearing Luo Cuilian's face, dressed in a mandarin gown, was dashing across the perilous ground with great agility, spectacularly evading lightning that no human could avoid while swiftly closing in on the pale-haired aristocrat.

Wielding the Divine Sword of Salvation in an upper stance, the aristocrat swung down at the girl.

Dodging this slash, the girl approached head on. Punching straight, she aimed for the side of the aristocrat's abdomen. However, the aristocrat immediately released the divine sword wielded in his left, using both hands to block the girl's fist—

"Eh, could that be Nee-san?"

"Yes. By extending tendrils of psychic sensing from the Netherworld to the earth, I have projected the scene captured by my senses. In exchange for this appearance, Her Eminence must have recovered her strength."

"Her Eminence never fails to impress. Even in unfavorable situations, she can still force her way to find a solution."

Swinging the divine blade, the aristocrat engaged the pubescent demonic cult leader in close quarters combat.

Although the sea's light-blue surface was not particularly clear as a screen, it was enough to get a full sense of the fight's details.

Watching the demonic cult leader's display of divine feats, Ena exclaimed in admiration.

Godou could not help but gaze intently as well. However, the scene immediately changed. The battle between the hero of the divine sword and the young Luo Cuilian—Just now, they had been watching this scene from the grandstand, but the angle suddenly changed to overhead from the sky.

Furthermore, the viewpoint kept rising.

Instead of showing the entirety of the racing circuit serving as the battle arena, the surrounding land was displayed.

"W-What's going on?"

Godou asked in surprise. The racing circuit was built in the mountains. But centered around that location, all the mountain vegetation kept withering.

Leaves and flowers dried up and shattered. Tree bark and branches lost moisture, turning into dust.

All vegetation within a two or three kilometer radius of the racing circuit had instantly withered, producing a barren land. Furthermore, this "circle of death" kept expanding.

"Just from swinging the Divine Sword of Salvation, His Highness' internal temperature rises. Shrouded in heat, the earth suffers damage while the resulting effects spread gradually throughout the world..."

An oracle from Yuri. Godou sighed.

"I get it, Mariya. Looks like I must make my way there quickly."

"I pray for your victory. I will also do everything in my power."

Strong and resolute, Yuri smiled calmly without showing any signs of unease.

Then setting off was the only thing left to do. Godou nodded at the beautiful Hime-Miko and signaled to Ena with his eyes. The moment for a direct confrontation with that man—the "King of the End"—had finally come.

Clasping her hands together before her chest, Yuri meditated.

Next, the ground underfoot glowed with blue light.

Immediately after that, Godou and Ena floated high up in the sky within an instant. Just as it became possible to see the white beach and green forest far below, their view instantly turned dark —

They were starting their return to reality from the Netherworld.

The Divine Sword Mandala rained down hundreds, thousands of lightning strikes.

Like indiscriminate bombardment, the attack devastated the ground mercilessly, killing everything below. Rather than a combat instrument, it would be more accurate to call it a strategic weapon.

In order to evade the endless lightning descending upon the ground, Luo Cuilian was using Daoist arts.

That being said, she was not invoking spells for protection or defense. The lightning of salvation—Its true form consisted of divine weapons conferred upon the "King of the End" by the gods. Even the most elite of Daoist spells would probably be neutralized with ease.

Besides, such pedestrian methods did not suit Luo Cuilian's personality either.

During this time, she was using Daoist arts to move her body dozens of meters instead of meters at a time, thereby evading the attacks of lightning.

In the world of Daoist arts, this spell was known as [Terrain Reduction].

However, despite merely reducing distances, the spell of Terrain Reduction was of extremely high difficulty. In addition, she had to use the principles of the mind's eye to guard against incoming lightning while simultaneously using Terrain Reduction instantaneously whenever she sensed danger. Moreover, she had already used this method to evade lightning strikes twenty, even thirty times—

Such a feat was only possible for Luo Cuilian who had trained in Daoist and martial arts to the very pinnacle.

Despite her body's fragility, this amazing accomplishment was possible just by making use of a Campione's magic power far surpassing that of humans. Normally, it would deplete the user's magic power.

Luo Cuilian was evading lightning in this manner while fighting in melee range.

Just as she had declared earlier, she refrained from using palm techniques. Using the superb movements of *qingggong*, she closed in on the "King of the End," attacking fiercely with kicks and punches.

Faced with the demonic cult leader's unarmed arts, the King of the End swung the divine blade—countering with swordsmanship .

"Just as I thought."

A smile of delight surfaced on the corners of Luo Cuilian's lips.

Her guess proved to be correct. When she was in melee range of the "King of the End," the lightning of salvation did not attack. To prevent attacking its own master no matter what, the Divine Sword Mandala avoided raining lightning down next to him.

This allowed her to concentrate on unarmed combat, providing Luo Cuilian with an extra edge to her arts.

"How about you take your earlier words back? I wouldn't mind if you summoned that bizarre-looking wind god or the Great Sage Equaling Heaven to repel me!"

Luo Cuilian suddenly charged the enemy head on, swinging her fist in close range.

A swift punch. However, it also carried force from the Divine Might of Vajrapani. In addition, there was also the momentum from kicking the ground to initiate the charge.

A magical punch sufficient to smash the enemy's entire body with just a glancing blow.

However, the "King of the End" simply used his right hand to catch Luo Cuilian's fist with ease. The Divine Might of Vajrapani sending the aristocrat's palm flying—That did not happen.

Instead, the lightning released from his left hand was scorching Luo Cuilian's young and tiny body!

This was part of his indestructibility, witnessed in the previous battle. Repelling the enemy instantly when struck by a heavy blow, enduring the attack without suffering any harm.

"Rather, Your Highness Luo Cuilian should be the one to stop overexerting this body. At the very least, you should bring out all of your martial arts..."

"Hohoho. Worry not. I am unharmed even by this."

Luo Cuilian had taken on the lightning attack at extremely close range.

But just as she declared, she was unscathed. Her lovely face did not show the slightest burn. Instantaneously, she had manifested a Benevolent King's avatar upon herself as a guardian angel, thereby protecting herself.

Hmph—The Devil King and the hero both smiled valorously at the same time.

Using martial arts and authorities at the same time to break out of predicaments. This was the instant when they expressed approval of each other's methods, offering praise. Then the battle continued.

The mystic techniques of unarmed combat as performed by the pubescent body. The mystic techniques as performed using the holy blade and sacred lightning.

Rather than a duel vying for supremacy, it was a spectacular performance more akin to sword dancing.

"As expected of Master... I can't believe she's maintaining stalemate in such an ingenious manner."

Meanwhile, Lu Yinghua muttered while watching the battle.

The descended lightning of salvation had mercilessly obliterated various parts of the racing circuit through electrical heat and shock. No part of the course's surface or the grandstand remained recognizable.

Everyone had left the extremely dangerous racing circuit, escaping to the mountains behind.

Erica and Liliana were with Lu Yinghua as well. The trio was watching the battle's progression from high ground, waiting for the moment to assist Her Eminence any time.

"I remember Her Eminence mentioned this earlier: 'On the level of stalling for time, I shall have a little fun in the meantime.'"

Liliana murmured.

There was a reason why the ultimate duel between Devil King and hero resembled sword dancing. Both sides were deliberately holding back from full force, imposing limits on their own power. Both of them had retained composure.

Also, the one who created this situation was precisely Her Eminence Luo Hao.

With feelings stirring deeply within her, Erica commented quietly.

"This might come across as somewhat offensive, but I am truly surprised. Upholding the conviction to defeat the enemy fair and square no matter what, against any kind of opponent, and to actualize such beliefs... That was my original impression of Her Eminence Luo Hao."

"That's only the surface on the matter of appearances versus reality. Don't forget that. Purely in terms of combat strength, most gods are far stronger than the various godslaying Devil Kings. In spite of that, Luo Cuilian has remained victorious the whole time so far."

At this moment, Lu Yinghua was not making a face like a disciple trying to brag about his own master.

Instead, it was an expression filled with admiration for the extraordinary qualities of the person who had raised him.

"As the saying goes, 'all's fair in love and war,' right? On the matter of war, Master is quite outstanding too. After all, she is someone who will resort to every sort of guile and trickery to seize victory, trampling those who rely on the power known as 'strength in numbers.' Her mind switches to war mode when engaged in contests of martial arts."

"...I see."

Liliana nodded. This was the strategy of "catching the enemy unprepared through deceit or obfuscation."

This might be denounced as underhanded in martial arts contests, but if the arena was changed to a *battlefield* with troops under one's command, such behavior would be extolled as virtues or wisdom befitting a king or a general.

"You'll understand just by playing a game of mahjong with Master."

" "Mahjong!?" "

"Surprising, isn't it? But Master knows how to play the game. After all, there is no lack of opportunities to learn weird stuff for someone living in that kind of outlaw community with Daoists and martial artists. But Master's playing style is absolutely nasty..."

In front of the dumbfounded knights, Lu Yinghua sighed.

"Because she possesses abnormal gambling luck, sharp instincts and extraordinary guts to begin with, playing normally is already like cheating. Plus using her nimble fingers to swap mahjong tiles secretly, even using Daoist arts on occasion, she simply cheats to her heart's content."

"Hold on there. You're saying that Her Eminence Luo Hao cheats?"

"It is quite unbelievable after all."

"Oh lord. When Master approached the mahjong table for the first time, all the other players were scoundrels conspiring together . But Master ended up seeing through all their tricks, learning the techniques and making them her own, easily achieving overwhelming victory."

" "....." "

"Then Master must have thought to herself: 'I get it now, mahjong is a game where you win by collecting the needed tiles from all four players in as little time as possible.' Master always goes for the hand with four hidden triples as a minimum, but if you're careless, she might even complete the Heavenly Gates hand with extreme speed."

"Listening to you, I just noticed how the same principle applies in this battle."

Next to the surprised Liliana, Erica reexamined the situation at hand.

The Devil King exterminator was unleashing numerous attacks. Her Eminence Luo Hao was skillfully evading, defending against and avoiding these attacks with perfection, using mysterious martial arts accompanied with Daoist arts at the same time.

Apart from her, no one in the entire world could accomplish such absurd feats.

Impossible to emulate. It even felt as though no one in the future could ever reach her level.

But if this were a strict test of martial arts ability, she would be disqualified for cheating. After all, there was no system for using Daoist arts and a Campione's authorities together...

Enough with the small talk, this battle akin to sword dancing had persisted for over an hour by now.

Signs of fatigue were gradually surfacing on Luo Cuilian's young face. Glistening sweat dripped from her forehead while her lips tensed in a smile of delight.

Then at this moment, the "King of the End" suddenly withdrew the divine blade. Returning the Divine Sword of Salvation to its sheath on his back, he smiled politely. He intended to show mercy to Luo Cuilian in her imperfect state of health—No.

He turned his gaze towards the racing circuit's grandstand which had been tragically destroyed by lightning.

"You have arrived, Kusanagi Godou."

Standing before his gaze was the youngest and seventh Campione.

As his attendant, Seishuuin Ena was also following him. While the sworn sister, Luo Cuilian, was stalling for time, Kusanagi Godou had finally returned to the present world.

Part 4

The return from the Netherworld was quite sudden. After learning that name in the Netherworld beach, it only took a minute or two to teleport to the ruins of the destroyed racing circuit.

Godou was looking down at the course from what used to be the grandstand. The de-aged sworn sister and the "King of the End " holding the Divine Sword of Salvation were there. Currently, they were looking in his direction, having interrupted their battle.

Godou whispered to Ena, who was next to him, dressed in her miko outfit.

"Seishuuin, get away from me. The others should be nearby."

"Yes, understood. Ena will go look for them."

To remain on standby with Erica and Liliana, so as to support Godou at an opportune moment.

Ena was assigned the usual role of responsibility. However, the current opponent was powerful to an unprecedented extent and greatly troublesome. Perhaps Ena's burden might be too heavy.

After all, as the wielder of Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, the Hime-Miko of the Sword held the highest combat strength among her companions. She seemed to have realized it herself as well. Nodding firmly, she left Godou with quick footsteps.

Finally, it was time to duel this man—the "King of the End."

Jumping down to the course from the grandstand, Godou walked over to the central area.

"Nee-san, you became smaller."

"You returned too late. Now that I have bought time for you in this manner, as the younger brother, you must compensate your elder sister with commensurate piety."

"Leave it to me. I came back to be *that prince*'s opponent."

Luo Cuilian's young and beautiful face smiled tenderly in response to Godou's declaration after he arrived by her side.

This haughty attitude did not resemble a child's at all. Even with her height and limbs diminished in size, her identity as the Ruler of the Martial Realm was not shaken the slightest.

The intelligent sworn sister immediately noticed why Godou had deliberately avoided addressing the enemy as the "King of the End."

"Very well, I can understand how the younger brother wishes to fight before the sister. As the elder sister, I shall concede the greatest formidable foe to you."

The sworn sister's smile changed in nature.

The earlier arrogant smile had turned into a smile of tender sweetness emanating from the heart.

She was probably feeling happy for Godou's accomplishments and for having acquired the trump card to counter the "King of the End." What Luo Cuilian normally exhibited was sublime, ice-cold beauty. Only on the battlefield, when locked in an intense struggle against powerful enemies would she show a smile that would put any flower to shame.

Hence, the "King of the End" stared at Godou.

"I have waited long for you, Kusanagi Godou. Apart from Her Highness Luo Hao, I hoped to meet you again too."

Shouldering the destiny of godslayer extermination, the hero smiled with gentleness.

His cheerful attitude was like meeting a friend again after several years of separation. To him who had repeatedly experienced the equivalent of eternal wandering and conflict, perhaps the Campiones were the ones he felt closest to.

Unable to resent him no matter what, Godou spoke up:

"On the other hand, I don't want to meet you. Since meeting you means fighting, you'll be forced to do what you hate the most."

"Hoh."

"Sorry, but I've no chance of winning unless I do this. So I'll be blunt from the start."

Just as the Devil King exterminating hero was feeling puzzled...

The wind howled. Ever since the "King of the End" awakened, strong winds had persisted in attacking the Kantou region. However, the raging gale formed a vortex above the racing circuit, turning into a mini-tornado.

Then the tornado took on the Wind King's form.

The war god of wind and steel, whose identity was concealed behind a mask and strips of cloth wrapped around his entire body.

Godou nodded. The dearest retainer to the "King of the End" may be the younger brother who shared the same blood. However, the most powerful subordinate was undoubtedly this wind god.

Noticing the master's danger, he had rushed here first.

A medallion suddenly appeared in the Wind King's hand. The divine artifact made of a gold-iron alloy—The [Arrowhead's Discus]. It looked like he wanted to summon the three heroes.

Staring closely at the "King of the End," Godou spoke in a low voice.

"—You are the hero who frequently leads subordinates. As noble royalty, as a general, one who leads soldiers to fight foreign Devil Kings."

Speech formed spell words, turning into power, turning into blades.

Godou's quiet voice transformed into spheres of splendorous golden light—The sword's spell words. These spheres of light flew

towards the medallion in the Wind King's hand. There, dozens of them gathered.

Those "swords" adhered tightly to the surface of the [Arrowhead's Discus].

The medallion instantly turned gray in color. Originally the color of a gold alloy's, it suddenly changed colors.

The sword's spell words had temporarily sealed away the power to summon heroes—The authority of the "King of the End."

While the pale-haired aristocrat was feeling surprised, the Wind King prepared his stance.

But Godou was not worried. The spheres of light kept manifesting as usual, filling the surroundings with golden radiance.

"Needless to say, you are the hero who vanquishes Devil Kings. "

Floating in the air, the swords of spell words kept increasing in number.

"Apart from that, you carry the characteristics of 'a war god of steel' and 'the wandering aristocrat who uses a bow.' Your tale was even taken into a story in Buddhist scripture, spreading its deep influence in folklore all over Asia."

Every time Godou spoke softly, dozens of spheres of light were produced, roughly fist-sized.

Instantly, there were hundreds, thousands of them. The number of golden spheres of light was enough to fill up the entire racing circuit.

Every sphere of light was a blade for slicing the "King of the End."

Looking from above, this scene would probably look like the birth of a spiraling galaxy on the ground. Furthermore, these clusters of stars were gradually expanding without impediment. But this was not enough. To further explain the origins of the Devil King exterminator, Godou continued to compose spell words.

"Perhaps there is no other hero who has produced such a deep influence on the myths and folklore in foreign lands. Here in Japan , the one most deeply influenced by you—was Momotarou. 'Once upon a time, at a certain place' is the typical opening to legends and stories, every Japanese person knows that. Even I know that."

"Spell words of wisdom. The weapon to tear me asunder!?"

The "King of the End" charged at Godou with speed and agility.

At the same time, the Divine Sword of Salvation was swung down from an upper stance with lightning speed. A bifurcating slice. Even with a Campione's super reflexes and Godou's dynamic vision, it was difficult to see through.

Nevertheless, in his current state, Godou was able to deflect the "King of the End" simply with a swift swing of his right hand.

In response to this gesture, a hundred swords of spell words floating nearby flew at the hero of the divine blade, knocking him away like a barrage of punches.

"Guh—!"

The light from spell words were rushing fiercely at the "King of the End" like machine gunfire.

The hero of the divine blade instantly held the Divine Sword of Salvation in a mid-level stance. Pointing the sword tip at Godou's face, for the very first time, he was using something other than an upper stance.

The upper stance only allowed the swinging of the sword's blade. A stance exclusively for offense.

When held in a mid-level stance, the sword could be swung as a shield. In other words, a stance offering defense as an option. In response, the Divine Sword Mandala rained down lightning again.

Thousands, tens of thousands of lightning strikes fell from the sky like a heavy rainstorm.

However, this racing circuit was currently occupied by the sword's spell words. Like clusters of stars forming a galaxy, the spheres of golden light were everywhere.

If one were to count these spheres of light exactly, the total would probably reach hundreds of thousands.

This enormous number of light spheres easily absorbed the rain of lightning. Lightning too powerful to absorb completely was deflected, altering their trajectories.

Not a single bolt of lightning managed to reach Godou and Luo Cuilian on the ground.

However, the Wind King charged at this time.

This was a dash on all fours with a lowered posture like a beast's, occasionally touching the ground with his hands. The warrior of wind and steel instantly entered the realm of divine speed.

Naturally, his target was Godou. But even then, Godou did not stop chanting spell words.

"Born from a peach, Momotarou crossed the ocean to set off for the ogre island of Onigashima. Like you, he is a 'traveling hero.' The vanquishing of ogres on Onigashima is a modified quest of Devil King extermination."

Naturally, the one who stepped in front of Godou instantly was the sworn sister.

With a flutter of her mandarin gown's hem, she used her right hand to strike the space in front of her. What she attacked was the wind god whose divine speed was impossible to capture with the naked eye.

"Also, the followers aiding Momotarou—the dog, the monkey and the pheasant—originated from your trait as a frequent leader of subordinates!"

Noticing the attack of the unidentified war god, Godou instantly yelled.

Meanwhile, the pubescent Luo Cuilian was using the mind's eye to see through the movements of divine speed.

One after another, she unleashed palm strikes. Indeed, they were not punches. With slender fingers extended, her palms were spread. Finally, she had unsealed her top skill, the Twelve Divine Palm Strikes of the Flying Phoenix.

Fingers sharper than the tips of spears.

Palm strikes hitting heavier than any hammer.

Knifehand strikes sharper than any trenchant blade in the world .

A flurry of attacks as closely packed as raindrops. Within the duration of a breath, she had already launched fourteen or fifteen palm strikes at the air.

One of the knifehand strikes was what sent the Wind King flying despite having turned into wind of divine speed.

Clang! The instant just as Luo Cuilian's left hand, smaller than usual in her pubescent form, chopped horizontally, a sharp

metallic sound was heard while the Wind King was smashed against the ground.

His appearance was still wrapped in white cloth with a mask.

The wind god with the body of steel had been hit by a barehanded chop, struck down on the ground. Apparently unharmed. However, the white cloth hiding his chest was torn, exposing the body beneath.

After a glance at him, Godou nodded.

"Just as Momotarou can be considered your distant kin, his three followers—the dog, the monkey and the pheasant—were influenced by your subordinate—the Wind King. Agilty, wings for soaring in the sky, powerful strength for vanquishing ogres, and most important of all, the detail of *not human in appearance*."

What the masked war god had obsessively concealed was his skin—or rather, white fur.

Finally exposed, the Wind King jumped back greatly in a fluster , landing behind his lord and master who had stabbed the divine blade into the ground to pick up the bow of steel.

"You are going to disclose our origins, master and servant alike, aren't you? Kusanagi Godou."

Saying that, the "King of the End" showed neither anger nor sadness on his face.

With an attitude of resigned wisdom, capable of accepting everything no matter what happened next, his handsome face became even clearer. Seeing his expression, Godou realized:

This guy was in all respects the polar opposite of Campiones such as himself.

"In that case, go ahead and speak my true name. If you have arrived at the land of truth—"

"Yeah. My [Sword] will surely block your arrows."

A white arrow suddenly appeared in the hero's right hand.

Analyzing the enemy was the ability belonging to Verethragna's final incarnation, the [Warrior]. That was why Godou understood. This arrow was infused with the power of the sun. Its firepower was enough to rival his own [White Stallion].

The instant the solar arrow was nocked on the bow of steel, Godou spoke:

"Your name has been a giant mystery over the long ages. Despite influencing mythology in various lands, both oriental and occidental, the root lies in Asia. Your tale even made its way deep into Buddhist parables. Furthermore, the hint to unraveling the mystery is Buddhist scripture—in other words, Buddhism itself!"

Despite a thoroughly trained body of muscle, the "King of the End" was slender in physique.

Even so, he was still able to draw a stiff bow of steel effortlessly, calmly shooting the solar arrow. The bowstring's sound reverberated all around.

Next, what approached Godou and Luo Cuilian was not an arrow.

Instead, it was a massive pillar of fire. Shot out, the arrow instantly transformed, turning into a flame pillar akin to coronal mass ejections from solar flares.

In spite of that, Godou still spoke calmly and quietly.

"Your homeland is the same as the origin of Buddhism, namely, ancient India."

Turned into a solar flare, the solar arrow was rushing at them as forcefully as a lava flow.

Nevertheless, Godou's mind remained completely unfazed. Calm. Thanks to assistance from his companions and the Princess of Glass, he had come to know the truth.

Godou gathered the sword's spell words around him. The spell words of brilliant golden light arrived in unprecedented numbers, already on the scale of macrocosmic galaxies. Compressing this light, he formed a dome of golden radiance.

This defensive power of unprecedented strength was for shielding his sworn sister and himself.

Hence, the spiraling solar flame was unable to incinerate this dome in the slightest.

"In yonder days, you were the heavenly child sent to the earth in order to defeat Ravana, the demon king of the Rakshasa, whom even the gods were unable to destroy. The prince from the kingdom of Kosala. An avatar of Vishnu who is revered alongside Shiva and Brahama as the trinity of supreme deities."

"Alas—!"

The pale-haired aristocrat sighed briefly. He had probably resolved himself.

The name that had been concealed the whole time was finally coming to light now.

"The epic poem recording his legend is the *Ramayana*, also known as the *Tale of King Rama*. The 'King of the End'—His true name is Rama, or alternatively, Ramachandra."

The solar flame attacking Godou and Luo Cuilian was extinguished.

The surrounding scenery no longer looked like a racing circuit. Everything had turned into an incinerated plain.

Hence, the two Campiones confronted the two gods, master and subordinate, face to face.

Godou turned towards the Wind King standing behind the dignified aristocrat and quietly chanted spell words.

"Serving King Rama was Hanuman, the devotee who soared the skies freely. As kin of the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong, he could be called the flying monkey. In addition to being a wind god's son, he also possessed immortality and monstrous strength."

The cloth wrapped around the war god of wind and steel was finally lifted. The mask also shattered.

Revealed was a strange bipedal ape, standing roughly 180cm tall. Indeed, he was very similar to the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong. However, his fur was white and he was wearing a red loincloth.

In addition, his face inexplicably gave off an impression of wisdom. At the same time, this air of virtue and brilliance was enough to call intellectual.

Chapter 6 - Aboard the Legendary Ship

Part 1

The epic poem, the *Ramayana*, originated in ancient India.

This was a long story of epic scale, recording the showdown between extraordinary hero, Prince Rama, and the Rakshasa King—Ravana the demon lord. Its original version could even be traced back to before Christian Era.

In modern times, Rama was believed to be one of the supreme god Vishnu's incarnations.

This was an element added through the passage of time. Before the interaction with such Vaishnava elements, Rama was simply Rama himself. As the protagonist of a legend about an ancient wandering nobleman, a man shouldering the destiny of vanquishing the demon king, a virtuous and revered monarch, a great hero.

Due to his overwhelming renown, the populace eventually linked him to a supreme deity.

"Prince Rama's destined rival, Rakshasa King Ravana was quite a special existence."

During their intimacy with Godou on the Netherworld beach earlier, Yuri and Ena had spoken in turn.

"Ravana was a rakshasa who had endured intense hardship over many years to obtain a boon of "absolute invulnerability against the gods and other rakshasas. A demon king who caused many gods to suffer. Furthermore, he possessed ten faces and twenty elbows—a terrifying form with ten heads and twenty arms. "

Whenever Godou's tongue slid across the two Hime-Miko's soft and tender skin, they would murmur in voices of ecstasy. In addition, they twisted their bodies in search of Godou's lips, speaking of myths in a manner akin to pillow talk in between kisses of mutually entangling tongues—

"Back then, the gods convened before reaching a decision. They intended to defeat Ravana by borrowing power from neither the gods nor the rakshasas—by a human hand instead. For this purpose, the gods petitioned Lord Vishnu, hoping he could descend upon the earth as a human to accomplish the task of killing the demon king."

"Hence, Prince Rama was born as Lord Vishnu's incarnation."

Born as the Ayodhya Kingdom's eldest prince, Rama was "the one who received every blessing."

He possessed a handsome face and superior intelligence. Revered by the populace for his benevolent and virtuous personality, he was also the strongest warrior.

However, his father's other wife conspired to crown her own son king, thus exiling Rama from Ayodhya for fourteen years.

The only attendants joining the tragic prince in exile were his wife Sita and younger brother Prince Lakshmana.

Thereafter, what awaited Rama while he lived secluded in the Dandaka forest were the inevitable days of battle against the wicked rakshasas.

Naturally, Rama kept defeating the rakshasas with his valorous might.

However, the strongest Rakshasa King Ravana finally appeared. Possessing the boon of "absolute invulnerability against gods and rakshasas," the demon king had his eyes set on the beauty of Rama's wife, Sita, finally succeeding in abducting her.

As a result, Rama began on a journey again with the Rakshasa King's castle as his destination.

In order to defeat the evil ten-headed demon king and take back his abducted wife—

"Your wife Sita was a spirit of the earth."

The lightning of salvation kept raining down on the race track.

Right now, this space was completely filled with over a hundred thousand golden spheres of light. These light spheres were all blades for slicing through the divinity of Rama.

"Sita was the daughter of Janaka, but by adoption and not birth. She was the child discovered by the king while plowing the land to build an altar, appearing from within the ground... That was Sita!"

The lightning strikes descending from the sky were all absorbed or deflected by the golden spheres of light.

In previous battles, they would gradually decrease in number whenever absorbing attacks—This time, these spheres of light looked like they were not going to disappear for now.

After finding out Rama's name which had been hidden all along , Verethragna's sword was bringing forth much stronger power than usual.

Furthermore, the amount of released lightning was gradually decreasing as well.

"King Janaka decided to wed this extraordinary daughter to a hero. He declared that whoever managed to string the royal family's heirloom of Lord Shiva's bow would win her hand in marriage. And you—Prince Rama—let alone stringing the bow, you even managed to break this bow in a show of power, the bow that no mortal could pull."

Hovering in midair, the Divine Sword Mandala had stopped firing lightning at some point.

Also, instead of shooting arrows as before, Rama on the ground was silently listening to the spell words woven by Godou.

Willingly accepting the verbal lashings as his own punishment —

That was the attitude Rama was displaying. While staring straight at him, Godou continued:

"Later on, the wife he married was abducted by Ravana. Setting off on a journey to vanquish the demon king, Prince Rama finally defeated his destined rival after a long battle, thus taking Sita back. Afterwards, he returned to his homeland and inherited the throne officially as the eldest prince. Thus the world rejoiced."

"....."

"However, the people doubted Queen Sita's chastity after her long period of captivity. Hence as king, Rama ordered her to prove her purity. This was also a king's duty. However, in order to comply with this command, Sita—"

As a daughter of the earth as well as Rama's wife—this was the name of the Princess of Glass back when she was a goddess.

Sita. Meaning "furrow." According to legend, this was the name given to her because she was the daughter found while plowing the earth.

"Praying 'accept me if my body is pure' to Mother Earth, she set off on a journey to the subterranean world—in other words, the underworld. For the sake of fulfilling a king's duties, you abandoned your wife."

"Precisely, Kusanagi Godou."

Rama nodded with a slightly pained expression.

Naturally, this was merely a brief episode within the myth. This was a story interpreted from the viewpoint of mythography rather than through the lens of love and hate between genders.

The so-called Sita was "a goddess who served as a live sacrifice to ensure the fertility of the land."

Tracing back this system of myths, one would reach the episode of "burying the killed deity into the earth to bring a bountiful harvest of crops, the people obtained food."

There were also stories of deities dying by immolation as live sacrifices. A metaphor for slash-and-burn agriculture.

As a side note, before heading underground, Sita had also survived trial by immolation to prove her own purity.

Based on the above, Rama's exploits should be examined through mythography.

As a man, he was irreproachable, above any criticisms no matter what kind. Even so, the man acknowledging all accusations was standing right here, confronting Godou face to face.

Purely judging from *human personality*, he was a man who was honest to a fault.

Godou sighed. This was the first time an opponent had shown this kind of reaction to the sword's spell words. Meanwhile, there were also two other individuals glaring sharply at each other.

Hanuman, the white monkey god of wind, versus Her Eminence Luo Hao who was currently in a pubescent girl's form.

"Having recounted my lord's exploits and listened to his great accomplishments..."

Hanuman spoke for the first time in front of Godou's group.

"You humans ought to show feelings of respect and admiration, yes? In spite of that, to think you would use spell words of wisdom as weapons, to subject His Highness to such insolent behavior, there should be limits to offense!"

"You are the one who ought to know your place, Hanuman."

In response to the intellectual white monkey god's tirade, Luo Cuilian retorted in a young voice.

"Daring as a retainer to interrupt a conversation between kings, now that is truly offensive to the extreme. Fufufufu, why don't you

act like a devotee who knows his place and seal your lips with a mask as before?"

"Having kept silent for close to two millennia, I honestly do feel tired."

The monkey with dense fur answered with an indifferent look in response to the demonic cult leader's smiling taunts.

Despite calm appearances, a vortex of killing intent was already swirling between the two of them. They were ready to sweep Godou, Rama and anyone else into a fight any time.

With a battle about to break out any moment, Godou said:

"Can we talk for a bit?"

"Talk? Me and you?"

"Yeah."

In response to this invitation, Rama merely pondered for a moment before signaling to his retainer with his eyes.

White Hanuman immediately nodded with comprehension, jumped backwards swiftly and did not say another word.

"Nee-san. Sorry but I'm a bit curious about this guy. Please wait for me briefly."

"No matter. It would be a worthwhile experience to interact occasionally with gods instead of fighting. Nevertheless, no matter

what words are exchanged, the end result awaiting us shall not change in all likelihood. Never forget this fact."

Impressive of Nee-san as ever, was that what one should say? Despite seeming quite senseless on the surface, this sworn elder sister was actually quite astute.

She must have seen through the younger brother's conundrum. After offering advice as a senior godslayer, Luo Cuilian also stepped back.

"I believe it's time for you to end your conflict with the Campiones—us."

"That would be rather difficult. Last time, I already attempted to procrastinate the Devil King extermination mission by a thousand years, but still ended up descending upon the earth in this manner."

Despite the two of them having drawn their weapons of assured destruction, the atmosphere was unbelievably calm.

Was the reason due to King Rama's own *human charisma*, capable of charming everyone, or the personality of Godou who championed the banner of pacifism despite being a godslayer?

"Also, due to the Holy Grail, my power suddenly increased to critical point. The ensuing result, what happened—Don't you feel it already?"

"Yeah. The temperature is very hot."

Godou replied to the wryly smiling Rama.

In fact, Godou had felt this ever since returning from the Netherworld. The air temperature felt like the harsh heat of midsummer—The aristocrat before his eyes was the cause.

Currently, his entire body was giving off high heat like flames.

Just facing him felt like entering the scene of a fire. If this continued at length, dehydration could very well result. Someone physically unfit would probably collapse immediately.

Rama suddenly looked out in the distance on the ground.

Fallen there were some binders left behind by people earlier in the racing circuit. Rama approached the spot and knelt down. Just at that instant—

The large number of binders broke down and collapsed completely.

All moisture was sucked out of the paper, producing the phenomenon of deterioration through age in merely an instant.

The owner of the miracle-inducing heat sighed and stood up, facing Godou.

"Just as you can see, if I were to remain on earth, many lives and objects will come to an end. Raging gales will howl, the land and the sea will keep rising in temperature, mountain ranges will erupt with fire, heaven and earth will rumble thunderously."

"Looks like it."

Godou had already seen the harm to the soil and natural habitats of the Bousou Peninsula.

Furthermore, he had been warned about the effects on volcanic zones. However, as a [Heretic God], Prince Rama's personality was exceptionally kind and gentle. Perhaps he might have a way to control the destructive influence brought by his presence. Despite these hopes of Godou's...

"Since my body temperature has reached this level, it is hopeless now. This heat will likely spread to every corner of the world to cause momentous changes in the world's landscape. Humans might call this 'the end times'—There are only two methods to stop it."

Rama—the king manifesting at era's end—spoke lightly.

"One is for me to exterminate all godslayers currently ruling the earth. Once my mission is fulfilled, I can sleep again in the form of the divine sword."

"And the other?"

"If someone among you manages to emerge victorious in a reversal, I will also return to the divine blade's form. Under those conditions, I will lie dormant briefly, perhaps for a few months, perhaps a few years, but at least there is a buffer period."

"Both extremely difficult demands."

Confronted with these frighteningly difficult conditions, Godou could only laugh aloud.

The "King of the End" was not undefeated so far. It was the opposite. In the battles against ancient godslayers, he had already met defeat many times. Even Godou himself had won in ancient Gaul.

However, Prince Rama had currently reached a fully awakened state using the great ritual of the covenant. A godslayer capable of defeating him in this state—There was at least one. Godou knew this.

The man whom the Princess of Glass had shown him.

But was he really able to reenact that kind of absurdly dramatic underdog comeback?

"Also, even if it's possible to defeat you in your strongest state, you'll revive soon enough."

"My apologies. I feel that these are unreasonable demands too."

He apologized quite solemnly in response to Godou's complaint .

Then as though recalling something by chance, Rama suddenly said:

"Speaking of which, how is that goddess? I cannot sense the presence of dragons and serpents at all."

"Oh, well enough... I suppose."

"I see. Towards her, I have been very cruel too."

Bringing up the subject of Pallas Athena, Rama lowered his gaze for an instant.

Deliberately giving an ambiguous answer, Godou secretly nodded in his mind. As expected, this guy was able to sense the presences of Divine Ancestors and mother earth goddesses.

Now was not the time to discuss this. Godou changed the subject.

"Compared to other gods, you're really weird, you know?"

This was the greatest question that had occurred to him for the past few days.

"Gods—[Heretic Gods]—will gradually acquire aspects contradicting the myths during their time of wandering the earth, right? But you've stayed as originally depicted in mythology. Your personality is very serious as well, to the point that it feels like you'll gather people's admiration."

This was knowledge that Godou had acquired after numerous intense battles, especially the fight against the Illustrious Sage, True Lord Erlang.

The "true god" who stood as Kusanagi Godou's nemesis. Upholding his convictions as the defender of justice to the very end, he absolutely refused to do anything harming the populace.

Furthermore, "King of the End" Rama was also a bit similar to war god Verethragna.

Back when he first met Godou, that youth was wandering the earth while maintaining a glorious hero's disposition despite having lost his memories as a [Heretic God].

A scene that had happened on the island of Sardinia, which felt quite nostalgic now.

"Unlike other gods, my myth also includes the detail of 'being born on earth as a human.' Perhaps this is the reason. Thanks to that, my original disposition has not changed much."

"So that's the reason!?"

"However, 'acquiring distortion and insanity while wandering the earth'... This curse ultimately cannot be avoided entirely. Even someone like me has bizarre aspects as logic would dictate."

Next, Godou noticed.

A quiver had appeared behind Rama's back without him noticing earlier. It was previously absent.

Who did it? Could it be Hanuman who had brought it? But the white monkey god of wind was currently having a staring contest against Luo Cuilian some distance away, keeping tabs on each other. He did not seem to be the culprit.

The quiver contained dozens of arrows. This was the gift from Indra, the god of thunderstorms, together with the ultimate bow of victory.

The mysterious quiver whose arrows would never deplete. Contained inside were the various arrows bestowed upon Prince Rama by the gods and sages who had mentored him in martial arts ...

Next to the quiver, *an amorphous shadow* was squirming restlessly.

One part of the shadow was quite similar to a human arm. That arm reached for the quiver, extracting a golden arrow. The arrowhead and fletchings were made of gold. Having obtained knowledge of Rama, Godou immediately understood. If this arrow were to be shot at Tokyo, an area of land comparable to the Bunkyou Ward would be destroyed in an instant, turned into ash...

Noticing Godou's gaze, directed at the movement behind Rama. ..

"—Stop!"

The aristocrat yelled curtly. As a result, the shadow immediately disappeared from the quiver.

Part 2

"What the heck was that just now?"

Questioned by Godou, Rama made a pained smile as before.

"The one who takes on all distortion and insanity on my behalf... I suppose. It would be a long story. But everyone has grown impatient by now."

Indeed, Hanuman and Luo Cuilian were silently waiting with full concentration.

No one was relaxing their guard at all. Furthermore, in order to keep an eye on the surrounding situation so as to react immediately to any sudden movements from the enemy, they were quietly exuding battle spirit—

Godou shrugged.

It was evidently time to swing the sword of spell words and end the conversation.

The blazing plain was no longer recognizable as a racing circuit at all. Godou transmitted strong thoughts to the tens of thousands of radiant spheres inside this space. Gather. Gather by my side.

Although it was fine to keep controlling the golden spheres of light as before—

The way he was now, Godou was able to create an even more powerful [Sword]. Furthermore, it was the essential weapon in the fight against the great hero Rama.

"I am the strongest, I shall smash through all enemies in my way. O blade belonging to the savior of the righteous, fragments of the glorious sun. Hereby serve the incarnation of victory!"

The instant Godou's lips composed these spell words...

The sword's spell words, reaching tens of thousands in number, the massive collective of radiant spheres began to move like a galaxy of light.

Colliding and merging together, the spheres of light changed in form and mass, soon turning into a weapon. *A longsword with a golden blade—*

The blade's length was beyond conventional, measuring the same size as Godou's 180cm height.

The blade was also quite broad, roughly the width of a surfboard. Its thickness was like a steel plate's.

Eight of these giant golden swords were created in total.

By consolidating the sword's spell words, these eight holy swords of Verethragna were created as a result—The strongest weapons specially prepared by Kusanagi Godou for the decisive battle against Rama.

With their tips pointing downwards, the eight holy swords hovered in the air.

In addition, they surrounded Godou on all sides. In order to guard their master from all attacks, the eight holy swords had entered a defensive formation.

Meanwhile, the Devil King exterminating hero called out loudly :

"A decisive battle challenging two godslaying Devil Kings... Seeing as that is the case, this venue is not wide enough. Then allow me to prepare an even bigger arena!"

Immediately, the ground glowed with white light.

Godou and everyone else had been standing on asphalt, the substance used to lay the race track. However, this ground had suddenly turned into stone tiles, shining with white radiance.

Frantically, Godou surveyed his surroundings to find the scenery changed all at once.

Somehow, they were now inside a city with white stone tiles everywhere in sight. The view extended endlessly as far as the eye could see. This ground was tiled entirely with stone.

Over half of the land was empty, most likely. There were not many buildings.

However, houses and towers were built in various locations, all using a mixture of stones, black, white and gray.

"When exactly were we moved to this town...!?"

"Nay! Prince Rama summoned this city!"

Campiones were highly resistant towards magic and divine powers. Since they were guarded by Verethragna's holy swords, even Rama would not be able to teleport them so easily.

In other words, he had *summoned this city* on which they were currently standing.

Thus, in this manner, the utterly destroyed racing circuit was covered up!

"This belongs to me, so feel free to destroy it. Make full use of your authorities without holding back. I, too, shall meet you in battle with full force."

After Rama declared that, a vehicle of war appeared behind him .

Although a vehicle of war, this was no weapon of steel created by humans in the modern world. Instead, it was a type of horse-drawn carriage that could carry several soldiers and armaments such as bows and spears. In the arenas of ancient Rome , chariot racing was one of the most popular sports.

Deftly, Rama jumped with agility onto the charioteer's perch.

Then this chariot began to move as though skating on ice, without needing to be drawn by any horse, flying into *the sky*!

"Vimana, a sky chariot!?"

Godou realized it was a vehicle that had appeared many times in the epic poem, the *Ramayana*.

Better described as gliding rather than driving, the vimana flew swiftly and lightly, raising Rama's altitude instantly. He was now seventy or eighty meters in the air above Godou and Luo Cuilian.

Then the Devil King exterminating hero yelled loudly:

"Divine Sword of Salvation. My army, O heavenly weapons bestowed by the venerated sage Vishvamitra and the great gods! Now is the time to show your true power!"

His command achieved great effect. Shining brightly in the sky, the Divine Sword Mandala suddenly *increased to four*.

Previously, one symbol alone was enough to produce lightning strikes of immense destructive power. Now, the number had increased to four. Furthermore, all four of them arrived above Godou and Luo Cuilian at the same time.

The four mandalas were positioned north, east, south, west in a formation, surrounding Godou and the sworn sister completely.

An indiscriminate barrage of lightning was launched again.

Four times as much lightning was attacking from four different directions. Incomparably frightening power and pressure. Godou was quite surprised by the simple physical increase.

"So that's what he meant by full force!"

The lightning was descending nonstop like a rainstorm.

However, Godou and the sworn sister standing beside him did not move an inch. Surrounding the two of them, the eight holy swords of Verethragna had created an invisible shield, blocking the lightning's power completely.

The lightning's heat and shock could not reach the two Campiones.

The eight holy swords were the ultimate weapons forged from the sword for slicing apart and sealing away the hero Rama's divinity. Their defense could not be penetrated so easily.

However, this type of attack powered by quantity was not pointless.

The sword's spell words would deplete gradually from use. If they were to suffer this endless barrage of attacks, the eight holy swords were not going to endure for long and would lose their power. Having fully awakened through the great ritual of the covenant, Rama definitely possessed the massive magic power required to persist in this absurd bombardment to the very end!

At the same time, riding the vimana, Rama also shot arrows from the air.

The arrows shot from the steel bow of the universally blessed hero were not merely ranged weapons.

Successively fired arrows each carried divine power from the thunder god Indra, the fire god Agni and the sun god Surya respectively. Rama was shooting these arrows nonstop without being stingy at all.

Whenever an arrow descended upon the shield erected by the eight holy swords, a massive explosion would result.

Even the weakest arrow was able to cause an explosion and shockwave that would destroy a town outright. Furthermore, there were destructive bonuses.

Wherever the arrows struck, fire and lightning incinerated the vicinity until nothing was left.

Even so, Rama continued to take out "the arrow with double power," "the arrow with triple power," "the arrow with ten times the power" without stopping.

"It's like hyperinflation..."

His senses going numb, Godou remarked wryly.

So far, the eight holy swords of Verethragna had defended flawlessly against the arrows' firepower. However, although the sword's spell words were much stronger than before, it was unknown how long they could last. Cold sweat flowed down his forehead.

Meanwhile, the pubescent sworn sister murmured with a look of comprehension.

"Speaking of which, this was the style of heroes in ancient India. "

After hearing that, Godou nodded.

Due to knowledge about Prince Rama, he immediately understood.

India's other great epic poem, the *Mahabharata*, also featured heroes who frequently used weapons including arrows and javelins. These projectiles were mostly magical weapons, using magic to spread fire and lightning, thus causing massive destruction.

Furthermore, the heroes would even ride chariots to fly across the sky.

After reading deeply into those descriptions, people came up with strange theories such as "ancient India was a super civilization surpassing modern science and technology" or " evidence of nuclear war fought using missiles between flying ships (or UFOs)."

"Godou. It is time for us siblings to counterattack."

"Well said. Things can only worsen gradually at this rate... I could probably win just by using this sword, if facing an ordinary enemy."

After revealing the hero Rama's name, Godou obtained these eight holy swords of Verethragna.

Just one of them alone probably held enough power to equal tens of thousands of the sword's spell words. However, the great ritual of the covenant supplied Rama with massive magic power—most likely surpassing the latent power in the eight holy swords.

However, Luo Cuilian made a gorgeous smile while speaking:

"Although the earlier match was child's play with tacit understanding between us to hold back... I never expected him to conceal power of such extent."

Godou had seen his sworn sister make this look before. This was an honest expression of delight at the enemy's powerful abilities.

However, she suddenly gazed at Godou mischievously.

"Now that Sri Rama has flown into the sky, if we were to remain on the ground—"

"We'll have no chance of winning. I've got an idea, so let me handle it. Building on all the effort you've put in so far, Nee-san, I'll put on a grand performance next."

"Fufufufu. To think you are bragging so boldly before me."

Godou was not used to the sight of his sworn sister smiling calmly as a pubescent girl. Nevertheless, he shrugged.

"You originally said you were conceding the greatest foe to me. After all, you only barely managed to recover, but you're still far from peak condition."

Although Godou had no idea what kind of secret technique his sworn sister had used...

The fact that her body regressed in age clearly implied it was quite a reckless method. Despite recovering her depleted magic power, surely it was only about half compared to the original amount.

And also due to having a child's body, her stamina would be different from usual.

At these times, I should be the one stepping forward—Thinking that, Godou asserted clearly:

"It'll trouble me if I let the wounded enter the fray. So assist me from behind, Nee-san. I'm counting on you."

"Seriously! Your manner of speaking to the supreme elder sister is still so irreverent. However, so be it. Being able to brag so boldly could also be taken as proof of your growth."

"Sorry about that. But I'm sure you'll definitely have a chance to enter the stage, Nee-san."

The enemy was powerful to an unprecedented extent. This was absolutely an intense battle requiring them to go all out.

Furthermore, while this conversation was taking place, the four mandalas kept raining down lightning. Rama also fired consecutively at Godou and Luo Cuilian on the ground with his mysterious arrows of massive firepower.

These attacks all came from the hero Rama's divine power, hence they were unable to break through Verethragna's eight holy swords.

Despite the hellish situation outside the shield from the impacts and explosions, the interior remained calm and peaceful. However .

Of the eight golden swords surrounding Godou and Luo Cuilian—one of them turned into the color of steel.

The spell words for slicing apart and sealing away Rama's divinity were being consumed rapidly.

After all, this could not be helped if one were to endure the enemy's overwhelming attacks persistently. Turning into the color of steel, the holy sword then vanished.

It was Godou's turn to switch from defense to offense. Speaking to the partner dormant in his right arm, he ordered:

"Ama no Murakumo! Get me one of those flying chariots!"

'Affirmative!'

This was the same tactic he had used in the battle against Uldin. Since the enemy could fly in the sky, all he needed to do was order

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi to replicate this power so that he could use it himself.

This time, the power to control vimanas was emulated.

Honestly speaking, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's copying power was not that powerful, unable to emulate authorities for causing grand miracles. However, one could only make do in this regard.

A chariot appeared before Godou, identical to Rama's in appearance.

"Thanks, take us up into the sky!"

Jumping onto the chariot with his sworn sister, Godou commanded. This mode of transport could be freely controlled by thought alone. Furthermore, the passengers were exposed to neither heat nor cold nor the effects of wind and air pressure. An unmatched and supreme riding experience.

Needless to say, Verethragna's seven holy swords flew and followed the chariot.

The seven holy swords lined themselves next to the chariot with four on the right and three on the left, practically like a pair of wings.

Neither did they neglect to guard the chariot and the passengers with a defensive shield. Thanks to that, even when struck by lightning or arrows, the chariot did not shake in the slightest. Given the way things were now—

"Get rid of those glowing things! Do it!"

The four Divine Sword Mandalas happened to be hovering just above Godou and Luo Cuilian.

Unimpeded by the released lightning of salvation, the chariot flew at high speed, charging straight at the first mandala.

Then the seven flying holy swords shredded the mandala's design. Thus, one of the Divine Sword Mandalas was destroyed. After repeating this type of attack three times, the chariot carrying Godou and Luo Cuilian finished eliminating all of the lightning sources.

By this point, of the holy swords lined next to the chariot, only three remained on the right and two on the left.

The counterattack had consumed the power of two holy swords . Godou hoped to find a replacement weapon.

"Ama no Murakumo. Can the black sword be used?"

Godou asked about the [Storm Bringer].

"Like last time, using the method of underground preparation... Although it's probably difficult without Athena, it'd be great if you could do that."

'Even with that earth mother present, it is still impossible. Have you not noticed?'

"What do you mean?"

'Fly higher. You shall see.'

Listening to the divine sword in his right arm, Godou mentally ordered the chariot to rise rapidly.

The chariot soared as though gliding, instantly climbing to a higher altitude.

Soon, they were three or four hundred meters off the ground. Even so, the ride still felt extremely comfortable. There was no floating sensation that often came with traveling on planes or the like.

Next, Luo Cuilian sighed.

"To think... A trick of this sort."

Only now, for the first time, the two of them saw the full view of the "city" that Rama had summoned.

It was a circular city, possibly with a radius of fifteen or sixteen kilometers. Although there were stone towers, houses and

orchards scattered sparsely throughout, most of the land was empty.

Towering in the center of the circle was a pillar of gold. It was the tallest structure in this entire city.

Furthermore, this giant city—*was flying in the air*.

The ocean was below. Most likely Tokyo Bay. Looking afar, Godou could spot what appeared to be the Aqua-Line, a road crossing the sea as well as the cityscapes of Chiba and Kisarazu in the distance.

This was the "city" that had suddenly appeared under Godou and everyone else.

This city most likely flew up silently from the mountains of the Bousou Peninsula, then went west to arrive above Tokyo Bay. Godou and Luo Cuilian had felt no signs at all during the fight in the city which had kept flying in a smooth ride.

Naturally, it was impossible to prepare the Storm Bringer underground. Because they were not over ground at all.

Through his knowledge of Prince Rama, Godou immediately figured out this city's true identity.

"An enormous flying ship, as big as a city... Pushpaka Vimana!"

Part 3

After Rama defeated the demon king Ravana...

Kubera, the god of riches and treasure, praised Rama for his accomplishments and bestowed a certain gift on him.

This was Pushpaka Vimana. A giant ship of the heavens, capable of flying according to the owner's will, the hero Rama's royal ship.

Despite being a vimana, the same class of vehicle as the sky chariot, it was much greater in size and grandeur.

That being said, the sense of comfort when traveling was equal to that of the small chariot. In this regard, one could tell that it was an object of supreme luxury.

"I would feel most apologetic if the kingdom on the ground were to get caught in our battle."

A sudden voice. Rama had caught up, driving his chariot.

"However, this Pushpaka is my ship. I am free to do with it as I please. Also, this should qualify as the venue for our battle."

"So you're saying you want to go nuts without holding back...?"

Looking down at the giant ship below, Godou muttered.

Their earlier location was apparently somewhere near the circle's outskirts. The buildings around that area had already been destroyed by the lightning of salvation, turned into a wasteland.

Using this type of attack in urban areas would surely cause horrific disasters.

Even deep in the mountains, tragic marks of destruction would be left on nature and the land.

These were all situations to avoid for the kind and gentle Rama. After all, he had chosen a relatively low-power arrow back when he first awakened fully from the great ritual of the covenant.

Precisely because he possessed an excessively powerful arsenal, Rama hoped to use this ship as the battlefield.

"The same goes for both sides. Victory is undecided yet."

Godou's lips twisted, displaying a savage grin.

Since the battlefield was not on the ground, this suited him perfectly too. Right now, he was less than twenty meters away from the man who must be defeated.

All he needed to do next was strive forward as hard as he could. Godou issued orders to attack.

"Go!"

Verethragna's five holy swords were waiting ready on the left and right of his chariot. Three on the right and two on the left, flanking the chariot like a pair of wings.

Right now, one of the swords from the right wing went for Rama's chariot, flying like a javelin.

Hence, the aristocrat of salvation immediately extracted an arrow from his quiver and threw it without using his steel bow.

"O arrow of Lord Shiva!"

The arrow thrown by Rama clashed violently with Verethragna's holy sword in the air.

The holy sword was the weapon for slicing through the hero Rama's divine power. Even if it were an arrow capable of turning the entire Tokyo area into scorched earth, so long as it was launched by Rama, surely it could be dispelled.

However—

"O Shiva, great incarnation of darkness, god of destruction. I beseech you to bestow protection upon Rama, son of King Dasharatha of Ayodha, the one who extols your virtues!"

The aristocrat's lips composed a prayer of spell words.

Immediately, the arrow conferred by Shiva was infused with divine power not of Rama's.

The supreme god forming the Hindu trinity along with Brahma and Vishnu, Shiva was the three-eyed god of destruction. Mahākāla, Maheśvara and others were the names given when he was imported into Buddhism.

Rama's divine power could be sliced apart using Verethragna's holy sword.

But it would not work on Shiva's power. This was the countermeasure that a number of gods, with Athena first and foremost, had used several times in the past to block the spell words of the sword.

Rama had rapidly blocked the holy sword. But even so, Godou still yelled:

"I am the strongest, holding all victory in my hands. Man and devil, all enemies, all who harbor enmity will be vanquished!"

Despite having lost three of them already, the eight holy swords were created specifically to surpass the spell words of the sword after all.

How could they be countered by such a petty trick—Absolutely forbidden! Godou poured magic power and Verethragna's spell words into the sword that was clashing violently with Shiva's arrow while focusing his thoughts on breaking through the obstacle.

This intent succeeded.

Crushing Shiva's arrow, Verethragna's holy sword flew straight at Rama!

"Hmm—!"

Standing on the flying chariot, Rama frowned.

Just as the holy sword was about to stab into his chest, a metallic "clang!" was heard.

Hanuman, the white monkey god, had intervened as fast as the wind, using a fist of steel to shatter Verethragna's holy sword.

Hanuman was the wind god Vayu's son. Riding the wind, he had flown here swiftly.

"It's you!"

"Certainly. Protecting His Highness is my responsibility."

Showing a face of intellect despite being a monkey, Hanuman declared boldly to Godou's chagrin.

"I won't be allowed to succeed so easily, huh..."

Godou muttered quietly from the charioteer's perch.

He was separated from Rama and Hanuman by roughly twenty meters.

Hanuman was staying close to his master, staring sharply in Godou's direction. Even if Godou were to attack with the four remaining holy swords of Verethragna, Hanuman would probably smash them all in an instant.

How could he make a move faster than white monkey god with unparalleled ferocity...?

Hooh. He inhaled deeply. Swiftly generalizing his ideas, he looked to the side.

Standing together on the charioteer's perch with Godou, Luo Cuilian had her arms crossed in a conceited manner that did not quite match her pubescent appearance, staring obliquely at the Devil King exterminating master and servant.

"Nee-san. About what I mentioned earlier, can I rely on you to do it now?"

"Fufufu. If you say so."

This tacit understanding was probably possible only as sworn siblings.

The instant Godou issued thoughts to attack, the first to move was one of the holy swords on the chariot's left wing, shaking its blade with a "clang!" The sharp Hanuman turned his eyes slightly, diverting some of his attention to the holy sword. At the same time , the sworn sister dashed out.

"O north wind, sweeping across the vast lands, flying over countless miles!"

Chanting spell words, she invoked Daoist arts. Surrounded by yellow light, Luo Cuilian's tiny body flew in a straight line. Towards Hanuman's white fur-covered body.

"What!?"

Tackling the white monkey god, the sworn sister flew towards the far side of the sky.

Even with a young girl's body, she could still draw out monstrous strength, peerless in the entire world, using the Divine Might of Vajrapani. Even Hanuman was unable to struggle free and could only watch helplessly while taken away from his master .

Godou made a stance to use his holy swords to attack the hero who had lost his bodyguard.

However, the opponent was no pushover either—

"Catching Hanuman by surprise huh. You siblings have made a splendid showing."

Offering praise, Rama extended the [Arrowhead's Discus] forward in his right hand.

He had apparently received it from his loyal retainer without anyone noticing. Godou gulped.

"In that case, I have no choice but to borrow everyone's power. —Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Perseus and Lancelot du Lac. Now is precisely when I have need of your assistance."

The illustrious hero Rama was driving a flying chariot.

The three heroes suddenly manifested in front of him. The short-haired female knight, the white-robed handsome man with

carefree and flippant airs, as well as the monkey king dressed in leather armor—

The three heroes were already riding their respective flying mounts.

To think that the [Arrowhead's Discus], whose power was sealed earlier, had already recovered. Facing the disappointed Godou, Rama called out to the three heroes of steel.

"Now that you have all gathered in response to my summons, I hope you can serve as my bodyguards in the absence of the Wind King—my right hand man, Hanuman. What are your thoughts?"

"Oh man, that ain't a good plan."

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven shook his head at the dignified aristocrat's request.

"We are all heroes who were born as swords. Swords are not shields. Our talents lie in offense. What don't you let us attack this Kusanagi brat in your place, Savior?"

"—All this chatter conveys nothing more than your desire to take the spotlight, doesn't it?"

Perseus remarked sardonically next to the objecting monkey king.

Then he glanced at Rama, the leader of what could be called an alliance of heroes.

"However, attacking in splendor is what a warrior does. Perhaps that would not be wrong. Although it is absolutely not my intention to accommodate the Lord Monkey, I do hope to switch to offense myself as well."

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven and Perseus were living up to their reputations. Godou could not help but marvel.

As absolute protagonists in their own respective myths, they were extremely driven to showing off. They did not have the slightest desire or disposition to obey orders like Hanuman.

Rama smiled wryly in exasperation at the two heroes' suggestions.

"Acknowledged. Now that I have fought the opening round, the three of you will take to the field. The formidable foe, Kusanagi Godou, must be defeated. However—one of you needs to stay as my bodyguard. Would that be agreeable?"

Generously yielding to the two heroes' willful demands, he pulled at the reins. In addition to benevolence, virtue and generosity, Godou could catch a glimpse of Rama's leadership as a king.

The Great Sage Equaling Heaven and Perseus nodded in agreement, meanwhile glancing sideways at each other.

"Legend tells of a great accomplishment where you served a certain exalted monk as a long-term bodyguard, so how would you like to take on this job again?"

"Oh? Then what would be the proper job for the great hero who's suited to rescuing beautiful maidens?"

"Gentlemen, you are like squabbling children."

Surprisingly, it was Lancelot du Lac who interrupted at this time.

"Surely the heroes of the world would be astounded to learn of this. No helping it. This knight, Lancelot du Lac, shares a long history with the 'King of the End.' One shall take on the guardian knight's role."

" "Hoh." "

"Unlike the likes of you, this Lancelot is a knight bearing the virtue of humility."

"Heh, now that's really generous of you."

"However, seeing as you're doing me a favor by accepting this utterly uninteresting of a role, I shall not pursue the matter any further. Allow me to enjoy this battle with gratitude."

After the Great Sage muttered, Perseus asserted boldly.

Perhaps Lancelot agreed to take on this task because she was the deity of knights who could put their lives on the line as bodyguards of noblewomen. In any case, with Lancelot's compromise, the enemy faction finished preparing their simple formation.

The two heroes began to advance towards the chariot-riding Godou.

"Hey, are you guys trying to avenge old grudges!?"

"I never expected a rematch with you in this manner, Kusanagi Godou!"

"Damn it! I'd better escape first, full speed ahead!"

But then, where exactly should he escape to?

Godou felt very lost while ordering the chariot to fly again. Moving in some unidentified direction, the vimana flew as fast as it could.

Living up to its name as Rama's ride, the chariot instantly reached top speed.

However, the enemy mounts were also gradually increasing their speed. The top speeds probably did not differ very much. Furthermore, as the master archer, Perseus instantly shot an arrow from his steed.

Naturally, he did not stop at one. Instead, it was in rapid fire—the ancient Roman hero kept nocking arrows to the bow, swiftly and precisely, drawing the bowstring and firing the arrows at Godou's back.

Furthermore, Rama also picked up his quiver with its inexhaustible supply of arrows.

"Evade!"

Responding to Godou's thoughts, the chariot zigzagged.

Thanks to that, he managed to dodge the large number of arrows chasing from behind. But due to the extra movements he made, his pursuers were gradually closing in. At this rate, they were ultimately going to catch up. Just at this moment...

(Godou-san...)

He heard a very familiar girl's voice.

Godou felt very surprised by what she told him. The opportunity for counterattacking had arrived. However, he must make sure matters proceed smoothly. At the end of the day, the three resurrected heroes were merely extras in the show. Was there some way he could obtain victory while consuming as little energy as possible?

Godou glanced at his right arm—where the black sacred sword resided.

Although he had no idea whether it was going to work or not, it was definitely a dead end if he did not even try. Nodding, he pictured a new destination in his mind.

"Fly quickly! Rush over to that place!"

The vimana responded immediately.

While maintaining top speed, it turned rapidly in a very fluid motion. Tracing out a U-shape in the air, it changed course all at once.

However, Godou's destination was neither land nor sea. The place he wanted to go was Pushpaka Vimana, the giant flying ship that he had rushed out of earlier.

Chapter 7 - The Annulus of Devil King Extermination

Part 1

Carrying the monkey god of wind in her arms, Luo Cuilian flew .

She was making use of unparalleled strength the whole time, suppressing the monkey god Hanuman, whose mighty strength was universally extolled in the *Ramayana*. Using a pubescent girl's right hand to grip Hanuman's white face, she injected the Divine Might of Vajrapani into her fingers continuously. It was causing Hanuman to groan.

"Guhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

In professional wrestling terms, this would look similar to the Iron Claw hold. However, the resemblance was merely superficial.

Gripping Hanuman's head with adamantine strength, the five fingers were also exerting force on pressure points on the head, sealing the target's bodily motions.

However,this monkey god of pure white was supposed to harbor more terrifying abilities in contrast to his intellectual appearance.

—He will not remain subdued indefinitely. I must leave the battlefield as quickly as possible to reach a location to fight him at leisure.

Reaching this conclusion, Luo Cuilian used clairvoyance to spot land a few dozen kilometers away before raising her flying speed all at once to fly in that direction.

Tokyo Bay's vicinity was too cramped for the peerless Luo Cuilian's tastes. Furthermore, Pushpaka Vimana was also moving west along the ocean currently.

Most importantly, the simple reason was that Luo Cuilian's flying speed was much faster than Liliana's flight magic.

Hence, it took merely two or three minutes of flying over Tokyo Bay to reach the landing location directly. Then Luo Cuilian used this unusual speed to attack.

Without slowing down at all, she landed directly. Crashing into the ground with horrifying divine speed, she smashed Hanuman's body violently into the concrete floor.

The white monkey god with the body of steel crashed like a meteor impact.

The direct result of Hanuman's impact on the ground was a large crater reaching almost twenty meters in diameter.

Concrete chunks of varying sizes flew and scattered in the air. Some were stone chips the size of pebbles while others were as large as small automobiles in size.

However, the war god of wind and steel was not so weak as to be injured by something of this level.

After the crash landing, Hanuman's head was still in the firm grip of Luo Cuilian's right hand and fingers, but finally, he was able to chant words of power.

"M-My father, O wind god Vayu!"

The white monkey god's body turned into a gust of wind.

Even someone like Luo Cuilian was not able to grasp a gaseous body all of a sudden.

Hanuman had struggled free splendidly, turning into a gale to rush from the bottom of the crater to its edge, landing safely on the concrete floor.

Whether the monkey's body or its beautiful white fur, neither was scratched the slightest.

"Fufufu. As expected of the valorous war god Hanuman of ancient India. When confronted with impending death, your ability to freely control the traits of your immortality is legendary as rumored."

Moreover, the laughing Luo Cuilian was completely unharmed as well.

Even using Hanuman's body as a shield, when crashing into the ground with that level of speed and momentum, a safe landing was impossible under normal conditions.

Logically speaking, she should have received injury and force commensurate with the rapid descent, dying on the spot.

In spite of that, Luo Cuilian had not suffered any damage of that sort.

She jumped lightly. Arriving in front of Hanuman with just a single effortless leap from the bottom of the crater, her motion had already surpassed the realm of lightness, as graceful as a celestial maiden unfettered by the restrictions of gravity.

This time, Luo Cuilian was facing off against Hanuman on the ground.

However, the wind god's son immediately hovered into the air using his own powers of flight.

"Beautiful godslayer, Your Highness evidently knows my origins."

Suddenly stopping at a point in the air—

Hanuman took a seat, *motionless*. For the wind god's son, the intangible and invisible air was no different from furniture.

While Hanuman was sitting in as though in a Zen mediation pose, a mandala appeared behind him.

It was a circle ten times bigger than the 180cm tall Hanuman. His master's mandala depicted countless weapons whereas Hanuman's was that of a great monkey army—a thousand strong.

The monkeys were all in armor, armed with blades and spears.

"In that case, you ought to know that. Before becoming the crown prince's devotee, I used to serve Sugriva, ruler of the monkey race. Furthermore, I was the general commanding the army of monkeys."

Next, the thousand monkeys depicted in the mandala came alive. Obtaining life and physical form, these monkey soldiers served Hanuman!

In addition, their fur was white like their master's. Their similarity to the wind god's son extending into other areas, the thousand armed monkeys were riding on gales, flying into the air.

Charging at Luo Cuilian from overhead, these monkey attacked with their respective weapons!

"Naturally, it is clear beyond a doubt."

In response, she shrugged haughtily as befitted the Ruler of the Martial Realm.

"Disposable pawns of this level—None shall harm a single hair of mine even if you gather a million of them!"

From those beautiful lips came a great shout as intense as a lion's roar.

In addition, her beautiful voice, so pleasant to the ears, was transformed into a shockwave of magical wind capable of smashing even steel. She had used her second authority of the [Dragon's Roar and Tiger's Howl].

"Generals die on horseback, soldiers destroy enemy encampments. Rivers of blood across the land, white bones lie exposed. Trails linger from horses gone, names remain on record in vain—!"[7]

She was singing a poem that lamented the tragedy of merciless battlefields.

The ominous verses summoned magical wind of destruction, sweeping lightly across the army of a thousand monkeys. In the end, Hanuman's soldiers—Every single one of them was pulverized and scattered without exception.

Losing their shapes as monkeys,the soldiers turned into tiny dust, scattering in the atmosphere.

But in the next instant...

Hanuman himself attacked from the air without warning.

Descending upon Luo Cuilian rapidly from overhead, he unleashed a spinning kick using the momentum of his descent. Spinning vertically, with feet descending like a guillotine's blade, it was an absurd feat.

An agile kicking attack only possible for apes to perform, this move was aimed at the demonic cult leader's delicate collarbone.

However, unarmed combat was precisely Luo Cuilian's top field of expertise.

She simply took a step back to dodge Hanuman's kick. Even so, the slight delay in her evasion resulted in a small tear on the chest of the Mandarin gown she was wearing.

Descending on the ground again, Hanuman spoke to the frowning Luo Cuilian.

"Seeing as they were defeated so easily, there was no point going out of my way to call forth soldiers. Haha! Oriental or occidental, past or present, all of those known as Rakshasa Kings were violent fellows without exception..."

Despite offering praise, the white monkey god did not pause in his movements.

Extending his right arm suddenly, he aimed a straight punch at Luo Cuilian's face. However, it was not a single strike. Within a blink of the eye, this feat of agility delivered five consecutive

punches with the same right fist. A consummate skill as fast as lightning. Nevertheless, this was nothing new to the Ruler of the Martial Realm who remained unfazed.

Using the back and palm of her left hand, she blocked all five strikes—At least, that was the intention.

However, the final punch was not blocked. Instead, her left palm was deflected by the fist's force. Instantly, she dodged Hanuman's punch that was flying towards her face, successfully evading the attack.

That being said...

The fist had apparently brushed slightly past her.

A faint laceration appeared on Luo Cuilian's cheek. Blood dripped down.

"You must have exhausted yourself in the earlier fight against the crown prince. Also, there are signs, no matter how slight, that your martial arts are falling into disarray on their own due to the shortening of your limbs."

Hanuman spoke in a courteous tone of voice.

"Excuse my rudeness for saying this, but fighting me in this state must be quite an ordeal for you, isn't it?"

"...I see."

On the other hand, Luo Cuilian showed an expression of comprehension.

"Your most prided weapon—is your own body, isn't that so?"

Salvatore Doni had called Hanuman out on the same issue back in ancient Gaul.

Swords and blades were not the Wind King's top weapons of mastery. Naturally, Luo Cuilian could not have known about that earlier scene. But through fighting Hanuman, whose identity was exposed, she came to learn even more of the truth than the Italian Campione.

Punches and kicks. Unarmed combat skills using the entire body.

The white monkey god's most prided weapon and trump card consisted of that.

A most appropriate opponent for Luo Cuilian whose most powerful skill was the Twelve Divine Palm Strikes of the Phoenix. Hence, she was able to fight by bringing the full extent of her martial arts to the table.

However, Luo Cuilian's rhythm was gradually disrupted by her body's non-ideal condition.

Furthermore, the enemy was indestructible—a body of steel. In a contest of durability, Hanuman clearly held the advantage.

Continuing to fight in this manner, the current balance would probably collapse in a matter of minutes.

Even if she wanted to defeat the enemy by using a swift offensive, the opponent was a battle-hardened god of war after all. He would see through this type of tactic. Then was there any ingenious trick to escaping this predicament—?

Tensing her young and beautiful face, Luo Cuilian stared sharply into Hanuman's highly intellectual simian face.

Part 2

Prince Rama's royal ship that looked like a giant city—Pushpaka Vimana.

In fact, the ship did have towers and houses of stone erected all over the place. Perhaps a large number of people actually lived there and it was possible the ship served the functions of a city.

Godou ordered his vimana sky chariot to charge towards this city.

In addition, the two heroes, Perseus and Great Sage Equaling Heaven Sun Wukong, were pursuing right behind him—

"You cannot escape my arrows even if you flee to this place!"

Perseus yelled out, positively thrilled.

Perhaps he was excited for the chance to fight a godslayer again .

He kept firing arrows from atop his winged horse. Furthermore, he was not shooting one arrow at a time. Holding four arrows between five fingers, he placed them all on the bowstring at once to fire them simultaneously.

Literally, he kept repeating this type of attack continuously.

Despite being attacked by just one archer, Godou was confronted by a barrage of attacks akin to a rain of bullets.

Those arrows would probably have pierced him immediately were it not for the vimana's flying capabilities. Moreover, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven was quietly waiting by Perseus side, sitting on his iridescent cloud.

"Kukukuku. It's time for the main event to start."

Laughing with glee, the Great Sage stared intently at Godou's back while he was fleeing this way and that.

Without a doubt. The Great Sage was choosing his opportunity to charge with divine speed. Such rare caution coming from him was probably because he knew that Godou was likewise a user of divine speed as well. If he were to attack recklesssly, it would be futile if Godou escaped using the same divine speed.

Judging from this, the Handsome Monkey King truly lived up to his reputation as a natural expert in fighting.

"...Just as I thought, I can't keep running away anymore."

Godou muttered. The 100m lead in the beginning had shrunk by more than half now. There was no way to survive unless he counterattacked.

Also, his purpose in coming here was indeed for the sake of striking back.

"Please. Obey my orders...!"

Taking a gamble on Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's ability to replicate Prince Rama's authority, Godou called out.

Namely, the power to control vimanas. However, his target was not the sky chariot he was currently riding. Instead, it was the supreme mode of transport, much more massive and powerful—Pushpaka Vimana.

Then Godou sensed it.

Although it did not extend to the entire craft, he was still able to freely control part of this massive ship that was like a city!

"Do it! Take out those guys!"

Godou immediately yelled out.

He had already found out through his knowledge of Prince Rama.

He knew what armaments the entire vimana was equipped with. The only reason why the ship's master had not used them was presumably because his own weapon was far more powerful.

In any case, regarding the orders to attack, part of Pushpaka Vimana responded.

The ship was a perfect circle with a diameter of sixteen kilometers. Right now, Godou had flown to one end, the northeastern block had come under Kusanagi Godou's control.

In terms of area, it was roughly one eighth of the total.

Built in the center of the northeastern block was the tallest tower in the area.

A tower of chalk—Roughly forty or fifty meters in height. The entire tower suddenly glowed blue-white and even emitted exploding sparks.

" "What!?" "

The instant when Perseus and the Great Sage Equaling Heaven were taken by surprise...

Blue-white lightning was released from the pinnacle of the tower of chalk, descending upon the two heroes who were pursuing Godou. Struck directly by this lightning, they were thrown from their respective mounts—the winged horse and the iridescent cloud.

"Hey, that's playing dirty!"

"A man who still cares not for elegance!"

The Great Sage cursed while Perseus cried out with inexplicable excitement.

Living true to their names as heroes of steel, they remained lively as ever even after a direct hit from lightning. However, Godou did not try to check out their condition. If he had that kind of leisure, even for a second, he should use it on escaping.

After that, the tower of chalk continued to release lightning.

Naturally, the goal was to pin down the two heroes, to prevent them from chasing after Kusanagi Godou.

With Pushpaka Vimana's support, Godou was able to shake the two heroes off his trail again. Then he discovered a plaza in the shape of a diamond.

Seen through Japanese sensibilities, this plaza somewhat resembled a baseball field in shape and size.

Except for the monastery-like building sitting in the center of the plaza. Ordering his chariot vimana to land, Godou descended on the surface of stone tiles.

"Let's find a way to end things here..."

The four flying holy swords following the vimana also came to his side, stabbing into the ground. However, there was more to do. Godou called out to Ama no Murakumo in his right arm.

"Ama no Murakumo, that past move—Start it now!"

'Hmm. One would call this a last stand.'

After giving a courageous reply, a black sphere of darkness suddenly manifested over Godou's head.

Ten-odd meters in diameter, it was hovering in midair. Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi had finally activated the [Storm Bringer]. Of course, substantial time was still needed to raise its power to critical point.

One minute, two minutes, three minutes, four minutes—Godou waited silently.

Focusing his mind, he poured all of his magic power into Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi in order to raise the black blade's power to its maximum in the shortest time possible. During this process, he could still hear lightning descending in the distance.

The tower of chalk continued to attack Perseus and the Great Sage Equaling Heaven.

The two heroes were probably enduring the attacks, although Godou did not believe that attacks of this level could defeat them... The moment this thought crossed his mind, there was a sudden exploding sound.

Godou turned his gaze to see an explosion at the pinnacle of the tower of chalk.

The two heroes had evidently destroyed the meddlesome tower .

Godou clicked his tongue. The [Storm Bringer] had not reached critical point yet. Its power had reached at most half or so.

"Your petty trick has outlived its usefulness."

"Oh well, I am hoping to see what other tricks you will play in your futile struggle."

Then the two heroes' voices came from behind.

Perseus and the Great Sage Equaling Heaven had finally arrived at the diamond-shaped plaza. They no longer had their mounts. Instead, they had arrived on foot.

Godou took a glance at the black star overhead.

Gwoon. *Gwoon*. *Gwoon*. Making unique noises, the giant sphere rotated with commensurate speed. However, it still needed to spin faster to reach critical point.

Godou sighed in a slightly exaggerated manner. Then immediately, he swiftly issued thoughts to attack.

"All enemies shall tremble before me. I am the guardian of the righteous!"

The instant he chanted spell words, the golden blades flew out.

The four holy swords of Verethragna, embedded upright in the ground next to Godou—two of them suddenly flew ferociously into the air, attacking Perseus and the Great Sage respectively.

But against this surprise attack—

"Nwoh!?"

"Hmm!"

The Great Sage instantly struck the holy sword away using his Ruyi Staff. Tossing his bow away, Perseus forcefully swung the curved blade he had summoned into his right hand, deflecting the holy sword.

Clang, clang, with the sound of two metallic impacts, the two holy swords of gold were sent flying elsewhere.

Godou frowned. He had two remaining swords of Verethragna, but although they were blades of ultimate destruction against Prince Rama, they did not work against the two heroes. Just now, he had tried attacking by using them as purely physical blades, but the heroes had defended easily.

"In that case, there's only one remaining weapon..."

Gwoon gwoon gwoon gwoon gwoon—

The black star spinning overhead had increased slightly in its rotation speed. Taking in the magic power pouring from Godou and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, it was increasing in power at a slightly faster rate than before.

Godou looked up with a resolute expression and pointed Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's blade at the two heroes.

Confronted with this reckless challenge, Perseus and the Great Sage were just about to step forward. In that very instant...

"Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword!"[8]

"They warred against the Midianites, as the Lord commanded Moses; and they slew all the males! And they slew the kings of Midian!"[9]

The spell words of smiting were suddenly chanted. Then clad in red and blue light respectively, the two Great Knights charged at full might, wielding a giant blade each—They sliced through the two heroes in their path.

Erica Blandelli had slashed the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong, in the side of his abdomen.

Liliana Kranjcar had embedded her blade into the chest of the hero Perseus, also known as Mithras.

The two girls were wielding giant trenchant blades as tall as Godou's height—Golden blades, Verethragna's holy swords.

Sitting in the center of the plaza, which served as the battle field , was a lone building reminiscent of a monastery—

The two knights had been hiding in the building's shadows. While the two heroes were fixated on Godou, they had charged out in that instant, picking up the holy swords on the ground to use as weapons. Indeed, these were the two holy swords that the two heroes had previously deflected using their own weapons, striking them to the ground.

"W-What?"

"How could that kind of blade harm us...?"

However, the two sliced heroes were overcome with disbelief. As heroes of steel with resilient bodies, they could not possibly die from one or two cuts, even if they were slashes executed by Paladins empowered by the spell words of divine slaughter. Even if the weapons used were the holy swords of Verethragna, the same applied, because they were weapons that had been strengthened in particular to defeat the hero named Rama, thus posing no threat to them—At least, that was what they believed to be the case.

But the two heroes suddenly showed looks of great alarm.

Rather than glaring at Erica and Liliana who had performed the slashes, their target was Godou.

They had realized. They had figured out the identity of the swords that had sliced through them, as well as the trap that Kusanagi Godou had set to make maximum use of them.

"Sorry, guys."

Godou muttered quietly.

"That's the same trick Verethragna used before. Switching the target for the sword's spell words in the middle of battle. Just now, I've already converted them into swords for slicing Perseus and Great Sage Equaling Heaven Sun Wukong."

"Gah—! It was this kind of trap after all!?"

"Lord Monkey, we will only end up annihilated at this rate. Let us seek refuge and return to the Arrowhead's Discus for now!"

The holy swords were far more damaging than the spell words in the past.

Furthermore, the two heroes were resurrected through the power of the Arrowhead's Discus. Now that the three heroes were manifesting at the same time, their individual powers were inferior compared to before. Naturally, this included their life force as well.

The attacks just now had inflicted critical injuries.

In fact, a large volume of divine power was already leaking out from their wounds.

Realizing their lives were in danger, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven and Perseus suddenly vanished. This was for returning to the medallion held by Rama, to heal their wounds for now—

"I'm saved. If it weren't for your help, Mariya, I wouldn't have been able to repel those two guys so quickly. You really saved my life."

(Not at all. This is precisely why I chose to stay on this side.)

Whispers were reaching Godou's ear.

It was the voice of Mariya Yuri, the Hime-Miko who had stayed behind in the Netherworld alone. The defeat of Perseus and the Great Sage Equaling Heaven had been accomplished under her direction.

Using the spirit power of psychic sensing, Yuri had been paying attention to the situation in the mundane world the whole time.

Furthermore, as soon as she saw the three heroes manifest through the Arrowhead's Discus, she had departed to summon knowledge about Perseus, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven and Lancelot.

Just by being in the Netherworld, she was able to control the power of spirit vision freely. This was precisely the benefit enjoyed .

Then using psychic sensing to connect to Godou's mind, she was able to transmit the knowledge obtained through spirit vision —

A simple mechanism once explained clearly in this manner. The only remaining issue of concern was that Godou was still facing two opponents on his own. A most unfavorable situation. However, Yuri had also informed him that his companions had boarded Pushpaka Vimana using Liliana's flight magic.

"Eh, hold on a sec."

Godou suddenly felt intrigued.

"Isn't it quite troublesome trying to cast magic on Campiones? But I'm hearing your voice so easily this time, Mariya?"

Oral intake was necessary when human magi needed to cast magic on a Campione—

Godou recalled this rule. Yuri replied in a strangely quiet voice.

(Oh... Regarding that... Not too long ago, we were in the Netherworld, engaged in that—that ritual, were we not?)

Rather than a ritual, it would be better to describe that scene as mutual contact of intimacy.

Godou could not help but go red in the face and answer " Y-Yeah." Due to the connection through psychic sensing, Godou was certain that Yuri was also huddling in embarrassment back on the Netherworld side.

(Back then... Perhaps due to the many instances of intimate contact with you, Godou-san, or rather, receiving love and affection, i-in any case, due to that ritual, a connection was established between me and you, Godou-san.)

"I-I see now!"

It looked like Yuri had already started considering back then whether to stay in the Netherworld. It was also possible that her spirit vision powers as a Hime-Miko had told her she ought to do that. Or perhaps it was a feeling of "somehow, this must be done."

(G-Godou-san. You must keep this a secret from Erica-san and Liliana-san, please.)

"Of course!"

His comrades happened to be walking this way. Erica Blandelli and Liliana Kranjcar, victorious in accomplishing their task. They were also accompanied by Seishuuin Ena who had changed from her miko outfit back to her school uniform for ease of movement.

"Good work, everyone. I'm always relying on your efforts."

"No helping it. We do this voluntarily."

"This is also part of our responsibilities, so please do not mind."

Answering nonchalantly despite having just undertaken a major accomplishment, Erica was living up to her usual style. On the other hand, Liliana adhered strictly to her knightly duties, maintaining a calm attitude throughout.

Standing like walls on Godou's left and right respectively were the red and blue knights. Truly reliable.

"I'm really sorry for giving you boring work, Seishuuin."

"Can't be helped. After all, Ena is the only one who can do this."

The Hime-Miko of the Sword replied cheerfully to Godou's apology.

The two of them looked up into the sky. Manifesting overhead was the black star—The mystic technique, the [Storm Bringer], was successfully raising its power towards critical point. Currently, output was roughly 65%.

The rate of increase was clearly faster than before.

This was due to Ena delivering magic power for support as the partner of Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, which was in charge of the mystic technique.

(A-Also.)

Still contributing inconspicuously, the Hime-Miko suddenly lowered her voice.

(After all, having engaged with Your Majesty in the Netherworld... in such pleasure, it'd be punishably unfair if Ena didn't let Erica-san and Liliana-san have a chance to take credit—)

Ena whispered softly in a moment of shyness.

She was probably afraid of letting the two knights know. Still unused to matters of relationships between the genders, she had made slight progress.

Finding Ena adorable the way she was acting now, Godou felt his heart begin to pound. He must change the subject before someone noticed.

"S-Say, I wonder how are things going on Nee-san's side?"

The sworn elder sister, Luo Cuilian, was facing the formidable Hanuman, a war god even more challenging than the two heroes —

Part 3

Luo Cuilian was performing palm strikes using her pubescent body.

Recognized as the supreme treasure of Chinese martial arts, the Twelve Divine Palm Strikes of the Flying Phoenix was a set of ultimate techniques consisting of twelve moves: Fengchudengmen, Fengyanchuanlian, Fengzhuataoxin, Feifengzhuiluo, Danfengchaoyang, Jinfengliangchi, Qunfenglianhuan, Xiongfengqianjin, Fengyitianxiang, Fenglongyinyang, Fenghuangshuangfei, Dafengwutian.

This set of ultimate techniques were originally taught as the Five Immortal Palm Strikes of the Flying Phoenix.

Adding seven additional strikes of her own invention, Luo Cuilian created the Twelve Divine Palm Strikes.

Nevertheless, she had not been able to bring out these palm techniques readily the whole time.

Hanuman was using unarmed techniques from ancient India.

This was a rather peculiar type of martial arts. The wind god's son was using his agile body of a monkey's to jump with speed and lightness, unleashing flying kicks from the air incessantly. Or

suddenly leaping behind Luo Cuilian, he would attack with punches from blind spots.

In addition, he was extremely fast.

No sooner had one concluded he was suddenly about to unleash four or five punches consecutively, it would turn out to be a barrage of strikes as closely spaced as rosary beads. Using a forward kick to contain the opponent first, followed by a mid-level kick intended to halt rather than defeat the enemy, he finally aimed a spinning kick at her head for a critical blow.

Meanwhile, he kept launching straight punches, swinging his arms sideways as follow up attacks even when the punches were dodged.

When these types of attacks failed to work, he would suddenly jump up to attack the opponent's jaw with knee strikes.

Truly monkey-like in style, an extremely peculiar and swift set of martial arts.

Luo Cuilian succeeded in defending against the vast majority of attacks.

Making superb use of her prided movement skills, she dodged using the minimum necessary motions. Or using mysterious footwork, she would instantly pull away to distances out of reach from Hanuman's limbs.

In this manner, she would block, deflect and push away unavoidable attacks using her right or left palm.

However—

There were also punches and kicks that got past her defenses.

Initially, they were only on the level of brushing past Luo Cuilian's beautiful face. But including his arms and legs, Hanuman's entire body was as hard as steel. A glancing blow against the face would be like a cut from a blade.

Furthermore, Luo Cuilian's movements were gradually slowing down as expected.

Punches and kicks that initially brushed past her—They were starting to land solid hits.

Luo Cuilian's pubescent body was showing bruises all over her body and limbs—the exposed parts being the upper arms, the thighs, calves, etc, whereas places like the abdomen were covered up by her mandarin gown.

Even so, she was still able to barely defend the critical vulnerability of the head.

Her face, young and beautiful, was unscathed. However, she could hardly conceal signs of fatigue while her breathing was beginning to grow irregular. Large beads of sweat dripped. An

expression appeared on her face, one that did not suit the beautiful demonic cult leader, the peerless beauty who wandered fantastical realms.

Were her loyal believers to witness her now, they would probably suffer an intense shock.

Nevertheless...

Hanuman scowled.

Despite being a monkey, he was staring at Luo Cuilian with obvious displeasure.

"I see now... To think you were harboring such intentions."

"Hohoho. Looks like my plan is finally discovered. You have truly impressive eyes of wisdom."

A sweet smile appeared on Luo Cuilian's young and beautiful face.

"If possible, I would have hoped for slightly more... But such a demand would seem to be a little excessive. I suppose my wish shall not be granted."

"I was feeling suspicious already."

Hanuman sighed

"It was unbelievable that one of the lowly godslayers did not take a desperate gamble to make a dramatic comeback. Instead,

choosing to fight me in a rather indifferent manner—In other words, you planned this ahead of time."

"Yes. I secretly rejoiced as soon as I learned that unarmed combat is your specialty."

Luo Cuilian's breathing suddenly became smooth and unimpeded. Her breathing and circulation returned to normal, she straightened her back and faced the monkey god squarely.

"In fact, I was also fighting King Rama with the same purpose. However, trying to find openings in his swinging blade was very difficult and the lightning of salvation was also a hindrance... So challenging to strike him with my palms, I certainly spared no effort."

Facing the white monkey god,she swiftly pushed her right hand forward.

Then the qi stored in Luo Cuilian's energy center beneath the navel—the magic power absorbed from Hanuman's body using her palms as media—erupted violently.

The energy center beneath the navel was precisely the human body's storage of qi, i.e. magic power.

What transported qi from this place to the rest of the body was the meridian network as it was known in oriental medicine. Qi and meridians were analogous to "blood and blood vessels."

After several days, Luo Cuilian's body was finally filled with massive magic power as befitted her Campione title. As a result, all the bruises covering her body became perfectly healed.

In addition, her torso and limbs lengthened. Her face also matured.

In terms of appearance, Luo Cuilian had been a pubescent girl roughly twelve-years-old for the past few days.

But now, she was back to being a young woman at her prime, roughly eighteen or nineteen years of age as before, an appearance that no one could disapprove even if she were to call herself " Kusanagi Godou's sworn elder sister"!

As the transcendent beauty instead of the adorable child, Luo Cuilian smiled delightfully.

"Fufufufufu, the Soul-Stealing Palm of Astral Absorption is capable of drawing qi out from a target's body through palm contact—An evil faction's martial arts technique. Were it not for an opportunity like this, I would never have had a chance to use it again."

The human body contained what were known as the Twelve Principal Meridians as well as the supporting Extraordinary Vessels.

By emptying the Eight Extraordinary Vessels of the qi flowing within them, one could absorb qi from external sources—in order words, steal qi from other people.

Qi—or equivalently, magic power—was something gradually cultivated through daily training.

The key principle of this martial arts technique was absorbing this precious energy from others to claim as one's own. Instead of using Hanuman as a target, absorbing the same amount of qi from ordinary humans such as martial artists or magi would result in the deaths of hundreds from depletion of life force. That was how much qi was involved.

On the other hand, precisely because her target was a god, he had failed to notice immediately.

"To think you have mastered this evil art... Truly, one must not judge by appearances alone."

"Since I am the one known as the Ruler of the Martial Realm, it is only natural for me to be well-versed in both the techniques of the light, passed down by the orthodox sects, as well as the techniques of the shadow taught by the unorthodox. Furthermore.. ."

Puffing out her voluptuous chest, Luo Cuilian spoke:

"Besides, how could one lay claim to the martial pinnacle without mastering the essence of both the orthodox and the

unorthodox sides of the martial realm? I, Luo Hao, achieved my present position not by reputation alone but through power and ability as well!"

The pubescent girl's body, lacking in undulating curves, was a thing of the past. The earlier mandarin gown was bursting at the seams everywhere, about to break apart.

This was the result of recovering her maidenly body. However, the damaged mandarin gown instantly transformed into elegant Han clothing, apparently a replacement garment conjured using Daoist arts.

Exuding a haughty aura as befitted the Ruler of the Martial Realm, this was the instant of Her Eminence Luo Hao's complete revival.

(Regarding Her Eminence—Please do not worry.)

Godou was puzzled by Yuri's whispered words of assurance.

But soon, he understood. The Hime-Miko in the Netherworld had called upon spirit vision about Luo Cuilian to confirm that she was safe and sound. This news was also transmitted to Godou through the connection of psychic sensing.

"Let alone safe and sound, she even managed to absorb the enemy's power."

This absurd feat was truly impressive, nothing less expected from Luo Cuilian.

Godou felt surprised while relieved at the same time. Even so, by staying in the Netherworld, Yuri was truly serving as an all-seeing clairvoyant. This made him feel worried instead.

"Although it's very amazing that your powers have reached this level, Mariya, I'm a bit worried. I'm expecting a backlash in the near future."

(You have... a point. I agree too. After all, the Netherworld is not a domain suited for human residence—To become overly accustomed to this side would mean losing one's body as a human.)

Yuri's whispers carried calm and quiet conviction.

She probably sensed danger through the power of spirit vision. As expected, he must settle things as quickly as possible and tell Yuri to return.

Just as Godou made his decision, Liliana pointed at the eastern sky.

"Kusanagi Godou, look at that."

Outstanding in eyesight and spirit vision, the silver-haired knight had noticed the enemy's arrival earlier than anyone else.

A minute or two later, Godou also noticed.

A tiny black dot was approaching from the eastern sky. This black dot was gradually getting bigger. He could now see that it was a female knight mounted on a white horse.

The war god of the lance and Amazonian queen, Lancelot du Lac had arrived.

Godou signaled to his companions with his eyes.

Erica, Liliana and Ena. The trio understood his message and instantly dispersed.

Lancelot's charging attacks carried power on the level of meteor crashes.

Even if they wanted to support Godou, it would be quite risky if the girls stayed too near.

Hence, Kusanagi Godou was left alone again.

Meanwhile, Lancelot and her horse also landed unaccompanied near Godou. On further thought, Godou recalled how she had always appeared with the other two heroes ever since her resurrection.

This was his first time meeting her alone since their reunion at Sardinia that time.

"Yo."

"Greetings again, Kusanagi Godou."

Formerly enemies in the same boat at one point, the two of them were able to greet each other quite naturally.

In addition, Godou was struck by a sense of dissonance. This Lancelot—seemed a little strange. In front of the doubting Godou, Lancelot descended lightly from her white horse. At this moment, the sense of dissonance felt even more intense.

"What's wrong? You seem a bit weird, you know?"

"This knight? Refrain from uttering nonsense. Though raised from the dead, this knight's soul has not changed the slightest. This is still Lancelot du Lac, the same one who engaged you in a deathmatch in the past."

Waving her honey-colored hair, the female knight smiled gently .

"Fufufu. One ended up reaping benefits from yielding the first opportunity to take to the field to Perseus and the Great Sage. Not only has this knight gained the chance for a one-on-one duel against you but also monopoly over the blessings of the Arrowhead's Discus."

The three heroes enjoyed greater combat power when manifesting alone.

Godou recalled his sworn sister's past teachings. Furthermore, preferring to showcase her own valor instead of relying on a three-against-one advantage, this truly befitted the militant war god's style.

But if that really were the case, why would she—?

Godou discovered the reason for his sense of dissonance. It was the fighting mindset and resolve ever present on the battlefield.

Although Godou had greeted Lancelot, the [Storm Bringer] still continued to spin overhead, gradually approaching critical point. Verethragana's holy swords also remained as well.

In order to use these weapons any moment, he did not relax at all.

However, the knight of the lake had currently landed with her trusty partner, the white horse, smiling with the same expression as she had shown when chatting in that seaside cafe in the past.

Another odd thing that Godou noticed was how she had yielded the vanguard position to others despite her zeal for charging straight at the enemy to attack head on.

Harboring these thoughts, Godou repeated his comment.

"You really did change after all."

"Fufu. Perhaps."

A smile surfaced on the corners of the female knight's lips. This time, she admitted it ambiguously.

"In fact, confusion is currently what this knight feels."

"What do you mean?"

"Rather... This knight is simply entering the fray due to the vanguard, the two heroes, retreating in haste. However, an issue still eludes understanding the whole time. Is the current battle truly what the 'King of the End' wishes for?"

At this moment, the name of the great hero of the orient, Rama, had already been revealed.

Nevertheless, Lancelot probably still considered the name of her lord to be the "King of the End." Also, Godou could understand the reason why she felt lost.

"That's right. Inexplicably, that guy has a lot of common sense and he even avoids battle."

"Kusanagi Godou, as someone who knows this point clearly, why do you fight His Majesty?"

"Well, since a god with the ability to destroy the world has shown up, even someone like me feels compelled to intercept and oppose him in the spirit of volunteerism. Also, there's—"

After touting his sense of public morality, Godou stared straight at the female knight.

"Maybe it's possible to tell through fighting? I found out the method to viciously crush what's forcing him to endlessly repeat these battles of Devil King extermination... this thing called destiny ."

Call it destiny, call it fate.

Call it guided by destiny, or call it bound by fate.

There are many who preferred these ostentatious descriptions. However, this was what Godou thought: Bound by something like that—Was that really a good thing?

It should be the opposite instead. It would be much better to crush so-called destiny and fate, to ignore them.

Although Godou felt no attraction at all to words like these, he was inspired with a strong opinion lately after witnessing the experiences of the man burdened by the destiny of Devil King extermination.

Hence, Godou shared his thoughts indifferently.

"Although I don't understand what those gods are thinking, I honestly feel that destiny or whatever should just go to hell. What do you think?"

"Hahahaha!"

Lancelot suddenly burst out in laughter, but not in mockery. She looked like she was laughing quite heartily. Laughter straight from the heart. However, what had provoked to laugh so much?

Suppressing her laughter, the war god of the lance spoke to Godou who was staring in puzzlement:

"Oh dear, pardon this rudeness. Actually, there is another cause for this knight's confusion."

"What is it?"

"You. After all, one still owes a debt to you, the victor of our duel. It is most displeasing, this feeling of tainting one's pride as a warrior."

"You owe me something?"

Godou had no idea at all. The female knight explained to the baffled Godou:

"Indeed. You are the man who fought this knight, Lancelot, and obtained victory, fair and square. The deserved reward is still currently in forfeit."

"Reward...?"

"Mm-hm. On the verge of my death, the late beloved child, Guinevere, used the Arrowhead's Discus, thereby taking in this knight's soul."

Lancelot suddenly approached Godou.

However, she did not draw her weapon. Neither did she give off any intent to fight or to murder. Instead, she walked over at a leisurely pace. Unbelievably, right before Godou's eyes, she also—

Suddenly kneeling down, she bowed her head reverently.

An action that Erica would perform on occasion, this was precisely knightly etiquette.

"What are you doing?"

"Kusanagi Godou, here is what this knight believes. To uphold loyalty towards one's lord of old in the truest sense, yet simultaneously offer compensation to the respected foe—This knight is convinced it is possible. For this purpose, one believes that you ought to be entrusted with the lance of Lancelot du Lac."

"!?"

"Will you listen to this knight's wish?"

Part 4

After Lancelot du Lac disappeared...

To avoid distracting from his concentration, Godou focused singlemindedly on raising the [Storm Bringer]'s power.

Naturally, Rama was probably still driving his chariot vimana somewhere in the sky. Currently, he no longer had any bodyguards left by his side. Hanuman was also engaged in a deadly battle against the recovered sworn sister.

This was the perfect opportunity to attack Rama.

Godou still had four holy swords of gold remaining, but two of them had already been reforged into blades for slicing Perseus and

the Great Sage Equaling Heaven. Unfortunately, swords could only change targets once.

He had only two holy swords remaining for slicing Rama. Naturally, he could ask Yuri to find out Rama's position through spirit vision, then send the holy swords over. However.

(Godou-san...)

While he was thinking, Godou heard Yuri's worried voice.

She had apparently seen it through spirit vision—Godou had a feeling that things would not go as easily as imagined.

"Did I spend too much time on those guys...?"

Perseus, the Great Sage Equaling Heaven and Lancelot. While occupied with those three, the great hero of the orient might have prepared countermeasures to resist Verethragna's holy swords.

—No helping it if that were the case. Standing on the plaza where he had faced the three heroes, Godou focused on maximizing combat strength.

One or two minutes passed in this manner.

"You're late."

"My apologies. Preparing a certain item required some time."

The sky chariot vimana finally arrived in the sky above the diamond-shaped plaza.

Godou started the conversation and Prince Rama responded calmly from the charioteer's perch. Whether the plaza's shape or the calm conversation, everything contributed to a feeling like they were simply meeting up for a promised game of baseball.

Realizing this, Godou laughed lightly.

However, Rama was currently holding a steel longbow in his hand. In addition, the gigantic square of a magic circle behind the vimana was undoubtedly the Divine Sword Mandala.

Godou was informed by the [Warrior]'s power of deep insight into the enemy's nature.

Rama had gathered up the remnants of power from the four mandalas that had been sliced apart, thus managing to create a fifth. Undertaking this task must have took him quite a bit of time.

Moreover, stabbed upright in the ground of stone tiles, next to Godou were the two holy swords for slaying Rama.

In addition, there was also the [Storm Bringer] hovering high in the air—the black sphere of darkness known as a gravitational storm.

Roughly twenty-four or five meters in diameter. At last, it had reached maximum power. The black sphere was making distinctive sounds, spinning rapidly on a vertical axis.

Strong winds were already starting to blow towards the black sphere.

Not just in this plaza. Wind was blowing across this giant ship of Pushpaka Vimana as well as the surrounding air space. This was the warning sign of the gravitational storm produced by the black sphere.

Both sides were ready for battle. All that remained was simply pulling the trigger.

Rama ordered his vimana to land. The master jumped off lightly and gazed in Godou's direction. Were this a baseball field, it would be roughly the distance from home to second base.

The [Storm Bringer] was also facing off against the [Divine Sword Mandala] in the air, separated by a similar distance.

Both were hovering in the sky roughly fifty or sixty meters above the plaza.

The time for a decisive duel was imminent. Godou suddenly spoke up.

"Let's put it this way, your weakness... Or rather, I already know how to defeat you."

"Really? If it is not too much trouble, please tell me."

Rama's curiosity seemed to be piqued. He leaned forward.

This was probably his first time meeting someone pointing out a "weakness" in his completely awakened state. The aristocrat's reaction made Godou smile wryly. Actually, it was nothing special .

"Well, you possess an endless supply of powerful weapons plus your magic power is quite astounding too. You're probably a thousand times stronger than me when attacking."

Hoh, responded Rama with a nod.

"That's why, no matter what, I must find a way to force you to defend. When switching to defense, you're probably about five hundred times stronger than me. Between offense and defense, it's pretty obvious which side is where openings will appear."

Back when the sworn sister, Luo Cuilian, had landed the strongest palm strike...

Since his awakening, Rama had endured that direct attack at one point.

It could be called a fact that slight openings would appear when he engaged in defense instead of offense. The problem was that no matter which situation it was, Rama was still far more powerful than Godou.

However, perhaps provoked by this inane joke...

Rama smiled and went "I see." The rust-like layer of his expression seemed to thin out in a rare moment.

"Understood, Kusanagi Godou. In that case, attack me with your full power. I, too, shall go out in full force against you, summoning my entire strength in order to defeat you without switching to defense."

"I really wish a guy who's already strong enough without doing anything won't say stuff like going out in full force..."

Rama's stern declaration and Godou's sighing grumbles...

This dialogue served as the trigger to sparking the fight.

The Storm Bringer and the Divine Sword Mandala were facing off in the air. The former was summoning a storm using gravity's power of universal attraction while the latter had turned into aerial artillery unleashing a barrage of thousands of lightning strikes.

The mandala released over ten thousand bolts of lightning.

The black sphere absorbed all of these attacks.

Indeed, hanging in balance was a battle of offense and defense in equilibrium. However, Godou had already learned from the skirmish at Minamibousou previously.

The sword's gravitational storm could only resist the Divine Sword Mandala for two minutes at most.

During this time, unless he launched another attack to subdue Rama, there would be chance of victory. There was no time to hesitate within the limit of these few short minutes. Godou's only

option was to unleash the Storm Bringer's power in full force at the "best opportunity."

At the same time, he ordered Verethragna's two holy swords to attack.

Stabbed upright on the floor of stone tiles next to Godou, there were two golden swords. One of them floated up and flew swiftly to attack Rama.

However, an arrow suddenly manifested in Rama's left hand.

The arrowhead was made of gold. Swinging this arrow like a short sword, the Devil King exterminating hero struck down Verethragna's holy sword. No, that was not all.

Unbelievably, struck down by the golden arrowhead, Verethragna's holy sword easily shattered!

"I heard from His Highness Perseus... The war god Verethragna is the retainer of the Persian supreme god Mithra."

Without waiting for Rama to finish, Godou ordered his holy sword to attack again.

This was the last blade for slaying Rama. However, the hero king of ancient India threw the arrow in his hand at the holy sword flying at him.

The holy sword of gold and the arrowhead of gold clashed violently—

The holy sword shattered. Continuing to fly with unabated momentum, the arrow stabbed into Godou's shoulder, which happened to be the base of his left arm.

"AHHHHHHHHHH!"

The wound felt scorching as though incinerated. Godou immediately pulled out the arrow with his hand and threw it at the ground.

However, the heat was swiftly spreading from his shoulder to his left arm then towards his chest.

At this rate, the heat was probably going to invade his entire body. Godou immediately raised his magic power to dispel the magical divine power harming him. It worked as planned.

The heat subsided and Godou exhaled in relief. However, his left arm had become immobilized.

Godou felt that this was not poison. Most likely, it was a power of light, akin to flames—

While Godou concluded with certainty, Rama explained:

"The weapon just now was what I requested directly from my old acquaintance, the god Indra, to borrow from the Persian realm of divinity, the arrow imbued with Sun King Mithra's power."

In the past, Perseus had used the power of Mithras, equated to Mithra, to seal off Persian Warlord Verethragna's abilities.

This was equivalent—Rather, it should be called the upgraded version.

Speaking of which, Erica had mentioned before. Persian mythology of antiquity had its origins in the Indo-Aryan branch of the ancient Indo-European language family, given the geographic proximity. In particular, the war god Verethragna had deep connections to Indra, the god of thunderstorms. Perhaps this was indicated by both gods carrying the epithet, "destroyer of obstacles."

As a side note, it was quite amazing that Rama could prepare such a weapon in such short time.

"As expected of the great hero, supported by various pantheons... Is receiving sudden gifts of weapons part of his power too?"

The same had happened during Rama's campaign against his fated rival, Ravana.

Just as Rama was locked in a desperate struggle against his opponent, the Rakshasa King, his companion suddenly informed him of a certain matter. Namely, that among the arrows that had been bestowed upon him in the past, one of them was "Shiva's arrow, capable of killing even the immortal Ravana."

Truly the hero who had the world and the gods standing on his side.

In that case, Godou tried using another incarnation.

"For victory, hasten forth before me... O immortal sun, I beseech thee to grant radiance to the stallion!"

The [White Stallion] incarnation was able to use the glorious power of the sun.

In response to Godou's spell words, *a second sun* rose in the eastern sky. It was currently the time of the day when the original sun was gradually sinking west.

Next, the solar flare shot from the second sun turned into blazing white flames in the shape of a stallion, flying towards Pushpaka Vimana and Prince Rama.

The hero, who had caused so many commotions this time, was recognized as "a great sinner causing hardship to the populace!"

However, a new arrow appeared in Rama's left hand at this moment.

"O arrow of the hero who had shot down nine suns! I beseech thee to bestow such miracles upon me!"

A jet-black arrow. Both the arrowhead and the fletchings were jet black.

It was quite similar to the arrow that Rama had used in Minamibousou last time. However, this was a deeper black. Godou recalled how Rama had called the previous arrow merely a "counterfeit."

Most likely, this was the real thing—In front of the trembling Godou, Rama readied his bow of steel.

Placing the jet-black arrow on the steel bow, he drew the bowstring to its limit then fired.

The arrow flew towards the eastern sky. Striking the flaming white stallion that was rushing towards Pushpaka Vimana, the arrow instantly destroyed it.

Even the sun's flames could be repelled and erased—What an ultimate archer to an absurd degree.

Furthermore, the Storm Bringer was also about to reach its limit. The black sphere's storm of gravity was gradually weakening. Despite barely maintaining balance, in ten-odd seconds, it was probably not going to hold off the Divine Sword Mandala's myriad lightning strikes any further.

As one would conclude, the ultimate archer needed to be handled by the ultimate knight.

"I'm counting on you, Lancelot—It's your turn to enter the stage !"

"What?"

Hearing Godou's plea, Rama showed shock on his face.

High up in the sky, even more distant than Pushpaka Vimana...

It was a sea of clouds. The flying white horse was motionless at a point in that part of the sky. The gallant female knight was mounted astride the horse's back.

The knight of the lake, Lancelot du Lac.

As the former ally of the war god, the "King of the End," she heard her new lord's voice loud and clear.

"Finally time to set off on an expedition, huh?"

She had already made preparations for a lone charge.

This was her prided secret technique. Charging with lightning speed from an astounding height, crashing to the ground like a meteor strike.

This lone charge assault had created giant craters on the earth many times before.

Using the magic power transmitted from her master, the godslayer, she unleashed a full-powered strike. In order to defeat her former lord. At this very moment, he had just shot two powerful arrows while controlling the Divine Sword Mandala. Compared to usual, he was in a more vulnerable state.

"O lance. Lancelot du Lac's soul is entrusted wholly to thee. Attack!"

Held in her right was the barbed cavalry lance. Held in her left was the oval shield.

She was clad in chain mail. Her body was entrusted to the white steed. With both feet on the stirrups suspended from the saddle, all armament and equipment were ready.

Carrying her, the beloved steed flew as though galloping on land.

Accompanied by lightning released from the rider, they descended rapidly towards Pushpaka Vimana far away, down below.

In this manner, the war god Lancelot du Lac turned into "white lightning." In just an instant, she arrived above the hero whom she was about to pierce. Indeed, it was lightning speed.

Using the speed and momentum from the rapid descent, she made a thrust with the lance's tip!

The aimed location was the heart of Rama the hero. The target instantly raised his steel bow above his head.

"You still live, Lancelot du Lac!?"

Using the steel bow to block the lance's tip, Rama cried out.

"I thought you had perished in battle because the connection to the Discus vanished... To think you switched sides to join Kusanagi Godou. Is this the choice you have made!?"

Neither the hero's voice nor expression showed any reprimand. Instead, he showed understanding.

Perhaps, ever since his revival, he had already noticed the confusion that Lancelot was secretly harboring.

While trying to knock her former master away together with the steel bow, the war god of the lance spoke in a radiant tone of voice:

"Indeed! A debt towards that man and loyalty to you—It is precisely the determination to cling onto both that has compelled this knight to choose the path of betrayal!"

Rama did not reply. He simply continued to smile faintly while signs of fatigue were displayed in his narrowed eyes like a layer of rust. It was as though he was saying he forgave her completely.

Then an explosion—

Unable to knock the steel bow away, Lancelot was still able to release the lightning's energy and heat from the lance tip all at once. This shockwave engulfed Rama, the plaza serving as the battlefield and even the giant ship Pushpaka Vimana.

Clashing violently in the air, the black sphere and the Divine Sword's magic circle were both blown apart and vanished.

Naturally, even her new master, Kusanagi Godou, was caught up in the explosion.

But there was no helping it. These were his orders. He had said: Unless you attack prepared with the fact that I'll be caught in the wake, there's probably no way to seize an opening to attack Rama...

Pushpaka Vimana was a flying ship in the shape of a perfect circle and looked as gigantic as a city.

The result of Lancelot's charging attack was a giant crater in the northeast block with a diameter beyond four or five kilometers. It was practically like the site of a meteor crash. Furthermore, the culprit, the white knight, had charged even deeper, causing severe damage to the giant ship's core.

The ground beneath Godou's feet kept shaking.

Rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble. The vibrations were transmitting through the soles of his feet. The damage from Lancelot's charge had made the entire body of the giant ship shake like an earthquake, giving off thunderous rumbling.

In addition, Lancelot was nowhere to be seen. After exhausting her power in the lone charge just now, she had vanished.

Also, Prince Rama was currently standing sternly at the bottom of the crater—

Even after getting struck by that charging attack, he remained completely unharmed.

However, his entire body was giving off blue sparks. The exploding sparks kept releasing tiny electric currents. Also, his body was giving off heat—clearly much hotter than before.

Standing near him, it would feel scorching like being in front of a furnace, let alone the scene of a fire.

"Come to think of it, the same thing happened when Nee-san's attack landed last time."

Godou spoke up.

The instant of the explosion from Lancelot's lone charge, he had invoked the [Raptor] and ran as hard as he could with divine speed. Mustering everything at his disposal, Godou had fled from the crater-inducing explosion. In the end, he failed to escape completely and was swallowed by explosive wind and shockwave of lesser strength.

Even so, it was still much better than staying in the center of the blast.

Then he returned to find the man who had stayed there, healthy as ever.

"This naturally happens after my awakening whenever I need to resist life threatening crises."

Rama muttered with a light sigh.

At the same time, lightning erupted from his right shoulder. Instead of merely sparks exploding, this was powerful enough to mercilessly blow nearby people away.

Godou reactivated divine speed and evaded the lightning's attack.

"Disaster has come. My body's heat has heightened excessively, past the point of conscience control. Gods or godslayers like you might not have much of a problem..."

The rust-like shadow on his expression deepened, shrouding Rama's handsome face slightly.

"However, innocent humans and the earth's mountains, rivers and vegetation have no way to resist. Attacked by my heat and lightning, destruction shall be wrought continually."

"Is that why you didn't pursue Nee-san and me last time!?"

"Indeed. Temporary respite would allow my body's heat to subside to a certain extent."

During the duel at Minamibousou, after Godou and Luo Cuilian had fled, Rama had not given chase. This was in consideration of his effects on the humans and cities of the land.

"Are you still able to fight?"

"I can still manage. However, overly precise martial arts are beyond me."

Rama manifested the mighty sword in his hand, its blade measuring 100cm.

The Divine Sword of Salvation. Entering an upper stance, he faced off against the Campione of the present generation. This was most likely the final phase of the battle—Godou prepared his resolve.

"Okay, let's continue."

"Understood. We shall decide the victor, fair and square."

Even in swordsmanship, Rama was an expert of divine level. He had displayed part of his skills during the battle in ancient Gaul when he was mostly using downward slashes performed from upper stances.

In Japanese swordsmanship, the upper stance was apparently called the "posture of fire."

This stance could not be used freely unless one showed vigor and intensity in attack. It was said that "fire" was a metaphor for the fiery spirit in aggressive offense. As one might expect, offense was ultimately this war god's true nature.

This time, Rama took on an upper stance again. In response, Godou invoked the [Camel] on the foundation of the [Raptor].

This was the combat incarnation of endurance and enhanced leg strength. The pain from Mithra's arrow gradually subsided in his left shoulder. However, Godou's left arm still remained immobile.

Even so, this was a double activation of incarnations. The strain was starting to cause waves of intense headaches.

Nevertheless, taking a risk of this level was necessary.

"Come!"

Rama repeatedly performed slashes from upper stances.

These moves were both acute and magnificent as ever, but relying on the [Camel]'s combat sense, Godou kept evading them.

Then just as he was about to counterattack, Godou clicked his tongue.

Rama's body suddenly released lightning. Just as before, it erupted without his conscious intent. Instantly activating the [Raptor]'s divine speed, Godou barely dodged the attack.

Hence, he had to end his offense without unleashing the kick. Furthermore, Rama attacked at this time.

A strike aimed at Godou's forehead. Again, it was downward slash of the divine sword, swung from an upper stance.

"Just handling that sword is tricky enough already, what a troublesome guy!"

If he were to attack with a knee strike during an opening in Rama's sword strikes—

Guided by the [Camel]'s combat sense, Godou was just about to take action.

Lightning was released again. In addition, this powerful lightning swept everything away from Rama's surroundings—left, right, front, back. A slight jump backwards was not going to evade it.

In the end, Godou used divine speed to retreat at least ten meters, thus managing to avoid the calamity.

"Are things getting violent because his power is out of control...?"

Until this point, Rama still showed finesse in technique and precision in all areas despite displaying overwhelming power.

But now, it was different.

He had turned into an plain warrior who released lightning while swinging his blade.

However, this certainly did not count as a minus. Lancelot, who was devoted singlemindedly to charges, was another example. On the battlefield, there were many situations where elements of " simplicity" would end up trumping over "variety."

Furthermore, Rama's body was starting to shoot lightning with rapid fire.

Attacks were released without specific targets. Not just forward but also backward and to the left and right, in any case,

indiscriminate attacks were launched in all directions at three hundred and sixty degrees. In addition, the range was not limited to the scorched surroundings.

The lightning's range kept extending, even reaching dozens, hundreds of meters away. Currently turned into an electrode, Rama could probably destroy one or two cities just by wandering the land. What a truly absurd man beyond compare.

Godou committed his final resolve. As suspected, he could only resort to that move.

"In the end, I have no choice but to take a gamble."

Activating divine speed, Godou charged at the Devil King exterminator.

Instantly evading the rapid fire of indiscriminate lightning, he arrived before Rama. Then unleashing a kick from the [Camel]—In that very instant...

(Kusanagi Godou! Unfortunately, time is not on your side!)

Due to perceptions while divine speed was active, Rama's voice sounded garbled.

Swinging the Divine Sword of Salvation diagonally downwards from an upper stance, he aimed at Godou's heart. Using the skill of the mind's eye, he had seen through divine speed.

Godou could not dodge this attack. The divine blade pierced his chest.

The mighty blade, 100cm in length, buried half of itself into Godou's body. The blade tip was probably protruding out from his back.

Even so, Godou did not die on the spot. This was thanks to a Campione's vitality and the [Camel]'s endurance.

"Seishuuin, use it!"

"What!?"

A figure pounced on the surprised Rama. It was Seishuuin Ena.

Held in her hand, the mighty blade, three feet and three-and-a-half inches long, was of course, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. Using a one-handed upper stance, the Hime-Miko of the Sword swung the divine sword ferociously from above. Of course, she was also using the secret technique of divine possession.

This girl was the strongest in combat power among Godou's companions.

She had been standing by a slight distance away just now, biding her time for this opportunity.

"O imperial blade of Ama no Murakumo. I beseech thee to grant me the warrior's honor!"

Taking in the divine energy of her partner, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, she swung the blade with her entire body's strength.

In addition, the jet-black sword still carried remnants of divine power from the Storm Bringer. Just earlier, the black sphere had vanished due to getting blown away by Lancelot's charging attack, not because it ran out of power.

If this sword could be stabbed into Rama's body to unleash a gravitational storm directly—

Perhaps the great hero's body might disappear, absorbed into Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. However, Rama was swift and perceptive after all.

Instantly releasing the Divine Sword of Salvation, he blocked Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

A bare-handed block—Aiming at the jet-black sword swinging down overhead, he blocked the attack by clamping his hands on the left and right surfaces of the blade's body.

Godou was still skewered by the Divine Sword of Salvation. Death was near.

Nevertheless, he was still grinning ferociously in spite of that. Because he was convinced the enemy had fallen into his trap.

"You finally switched to defense..."

"!?"

Having caught Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi in his bare hands, Rama was shocked.

At that very instant, Ena drew a second sword. On this rare occasion, she had a leather sheath hanging on her belt. Using her left hand, she unsheathed the short sword and sliced the 50cm blade into Rama's abdomen.

Ena could probably feel the impact of a solid hit through her left hand.

However, there was no bleeding. Rama was not injured from the attack. After all, he was the man who had successfully withstood even Her Eminence Luo Hao's palm strike and Lancelot's charge, hence this was only natural.

Be that as it may, the following words were engraved on the blade of the short sword that Ena was using.

'The one who is, and who was, and who is to come.' In addition, golden magic power was leaking from Rama's entire body in the place of blood.

Magic power was rising into the sky like a gas, spreading a golden canopy high in the air.

"Could this be—?"

'Woe! Naturally, 'tis one's curse upon thee.'

What spoke to Rama was the second sword held in Ena's hand.

This was the item that Erica and Liliana had forged together while Godou and the two Hime-Miko were in the Netherworld. This was to allow Athena to stab the sword of vengeance into her enemy despite not even having the strength to move her body—

This trickery had been devised by Erica. Casting magic to alter form and appearance.

Fortuitously, Athena's transformation into a silver snake had made her into an existence similar in composition to synthetic organisms created by magic.

Also thanks to that, Liliana and Erica were able to work together on a common task successfully as a witch and a master of steel manipulation respectively.

The short sword declared solemnly with the voice of a goddess.

'O King Rama. The magic power in thee was taken from the Holy Grail—that which was absorbed from this Athena's body. As the original owner, it is one's wish that thou couldst return a portion of that power. A curse cast using a goddess' life as the price—Even one such as thee cannot resist.'

In the past, Rama had fought the "godslayer with ten lives" in a final duel.

There was a reason why the fully awakened hero of salvation was pressured into a corner. Namely, the wife inside him—the essence of the goddess Sita—had refused to cooperate.

Her dying wish became a prayer that bound Rama's body, reducing his magic power to some extent.

And that godslayer had ruthlessly made use of that, causing the battle to end in mutual annihilation. And now, through a goddess' will, the same situation had been recreated—

"I see now. To think that even external appearances could be altered. It makes logical sense that I was unable to sense the serpent's presence."

Rama showed an expression of comprehension. Golden magic power continued to spill out even now.

A large fraction has already flowed out—Just as Godou was thinking that, Rama went "ooh..." with a painful look on his face.

Due to Athena's curse causing his total magic power to decrease , his awakened state was dispelled as a result.

The slicing wound inflicted by Ena cracked open wide, spilling a large amount of blood. The situation was now the same as back in ancient Gaul—Concluding that, Godou forced his body to move .

"Dahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!"

Relying on force of vigor and the [Camel]'s endurance, Godou forcibly moved his body despite his pierced heart.

Capable of traveling across the desert while enduring silently, the camel was the symbol of endurance and ferocity. Using this power to unleash a spinning kick, Godou launched his final attack.

"Guh—!"

The enemy instantly used his left hand to block the kick aimed at his temple.

However, Godou used his entire body's strength to send Rama flying together with this hand. At the same time, he delivered explosive magic power through the tip of his foot.

As a result, the Devil King exterminating hero was sent flying by this exploding kick of guaranteed death. Rolling continuously on the ground for a while, he finally came to a stop.

A moment later, Rama pushed himself up with the last of his strength after suffering this strike of assured death.

Staring into Godou's eyes—

'We shall meet again, Kusanagi Godou—'

Godou could feel Rama silently expressing his thoughts of a future encounter.

Immediately, the hero's body shone with red light—Then came a violent explosion.

The Divine Sword of Salvation, stabbed into Godou's heart, proceeded to vanish. This was the instant of Kusanagi Godou's third victory. But in spite of that—

While his consciousness was gradually fading away, Godou activated the [Ram] incarnation. At the same time, he thought to himself.

This was a shallow victory barely achieved by relying on assistance from many people and stacking several instances of good fortune together.

But next time... Surely that was not going to work again.

Hanuman was probably going to find a way to gather the necessary earth's essence required by the great ritual of the covenant. Athena was about to die too. Godou's hidden cards were practically all exposed. Ultimately, was *that* his only option left—?

The idea the Princess of Glass had seen through before he took his leave from the Netherworld...

Godou recalled that particular solution...

Epilogue

Having served as the battlefield, Pushpaka Vimana sank into the ocean.

Due to Lancelot's charge, the ship's core and flying functions were damaged.

As a side note, Kusanagi Godou escaped safely despite falling unconscious with severe injuries. This was all thanks to the dedicated efforts of the girls serving him, rescuing him then using flight magic.

A double knockout between the Campione of the east, Kusanagi Godou, and the "King of the End"—

It was said that this news reached the ears of every Campione within merely three hours after the battle ended.

The first to find out was Her Eminence Luo Hao who was still in Tokyo.

Hearing news that "Her Eminence had flown towards Tokyo," her direct disciple Lu Yinghua located her and reported to her.

Almost simultaneously with Rama's disappearance, Hanuman had also vanished from Her Eminence's presence.

Presumably, a mysterious bond had informed Hanuman of his master's condition. Thus, one was able to listen patiently to the latest developments from the disciple who had rushed over to Haneda Airport's pier.

Upon learning of her sworn brother's victory, Luo Cuilian was the first to nod with strong approval.

Then murmuring "hmm...", she gazed out into Tokyo Bay where Rama had disappeared, lost in deep thought.

At the same time, the former chairperson of Greenwich's Witenagemot was currently in a phone call with a certain Campione.

The other party was the guardian of Los Angeles, John Pluto Smith. This was a long distance call made from a high-class residential district in London to the west coast of North America.

After listening to the key points of the incident, the masked Devil King responded:

'I see.'

"...That's it?"

'In the end, the root issue has not been resolved at all. I believe that the current stage is completely meaningless despite the mixture of good and bad news.'

Smith replied coldly to Princess Alice.

Besides, the princess was still having a high fever. She was lying in bed in her bedroom, talking on the phone while leaning against a soft cushion.

'Also, one can assert with certainty that before Prince Rama's next awakening, someone among my peers will surely start acting out of line. Without a doubt.'

Leaving this unsettling declaration, Smith hung up.

The tone of his words were highly suggestive of what "acting out of line" meant in particular. The eccentric who subscribed to secretism often acted in this manner.

Only making cryptic remarks to pique others' curiosity then leaving them hanging.

"Seriously, Lord Smith is always acting like this."

Alice pouted and grumbled.

However, a nosy visitor also happened to be present. Although he looked very cold and distant, all that was needed were a few prompting words and he would start explaining things in a friendly manner, even matters that she had not inquired.

"Alexandre. I shall overlook your crime of entering a lady's bedroom unannounced without even bringing a gift. Please share your thoughts with me."

"Thoughts?"

"For example, countermeasures for sealing Prince Rama or the like."

"Hmph."

The man shrugging by the princess' bedside was Alexandre Gascoigne.

Coincidentally, he was paying a visit to gather information, just before the princess made the call to Smith.

Black Prince Alec, the user of [Black Lightning]'s divine speed. To him, even the mansion of a duke's daughter was a place that he could enter and leave at will as though it were the British Museum .

Saying the same thing twice was too much of a hassle, which was why Alice asked him to listen in on her phone call just now.

"Why are you suddenly unhappy? ...Aha."

Seeing Alec slightly displeased, the princess suddenly came to a realization.

Going as far as to completely forget her own feeble condition from the fever, Alice laughed lightly with a chuckle.

"What's so funny?"

"No, it's nothing. I simply have a hunch regarding what's on your mind. Despite seeking the true name of the 'King of the End' for so many years, to think you ended up losing to a History Compilation Committee member. Something along those lines."

"What are you talking about? I totally don't care at all."

He was clearly speaking much faster than times when he did not care about things.

Alice concluded her guess was correct. As though trying to evade Alice's warm gaze, Alec turned his head to one side and spoke with boredom:

"Besides, a so-called countermeasure to seal Prince Rama—there's no need to consider something like that at all. There's actually a very simple solution."

"Huh?"

Alice was dumbfounded by these unexpected words.

"In other words, as long as the seven of us are here, the 'King of the End' will gain strength accordingly, right?"

At a night market at Bangkok, the capital of Thailand...

A blond Caucasian young man commented in a frivolous tone of voice.

Salvatore Doni.

He was sitting at a snack shop with two plates of Pad Thai fried noodles with his butler Andrea Rivera across the simple table.

Ever since disappearing from Italy, he had come to eastern Asia.

"I've got an incredible idea about this. Hear me out, Andrea♪"

"Fine, I'll listen but before that, let me finish my drink. After all, it's definitely nothing respectable, a devilish idea. I absolutely refuse to listen unless I gulp down some alcohol first!"

News from Japan had been transmitted through the magic associations of the [Copper Black Cross] and the [Bronze Black Cross].

Having an detailed discussion with his lord about the matter, Rivera pulled off his beer can's ring in despair and resignation.

"Isn't it a very simple matter?"

In the depths of the Austrian Alps, the old man in the rugged mountain villa muttered.

Information regarding "King of the End" Rama was trickling in gradually through Dejanstahl Voban's devoted followers in the world of magic.

"If the Devil King exterminating hero's power rises for the sake of fighting seven godslayers... Then all I need to do is send the other six to their graves. I, Voban, alone shall be enough to take on the 'King of the End.'"

This was inside a great hall where warmth from the fireplace was providing excellent comfort.

Facing Voban who was sitting in an armchair, the young beauty smiled with equal "warmth" as the air in this room.

"Fufu, Onii-sama, you're such a joker. I can't believe you're saying this when you clearly hold me so dear in your heart."

"....."

Confronted with Madame Aisha who was like genial spring weather, the Marquis frowned with displeasure.

Tokyo's Bunkyou Ward. Erica's luxury apartment.

Several hours had passed since the intense battle. Night had already fallen.

Kusanagi Godou was currently sleeping like the dead on the bed belonging to the mistress of the bedroom. More precisely, he had died once already and was currently recovering using the [Ram], the incarnation of resurrection.

Three girls were currently watching over him by the bedside.

Needless to say, they were Erica Blandelli, Liliana Kranjcar and Seishuuin Ena. Although Mariya Yuri was still in the Netherworld, she was probably able to use psychic sensing to find out whether Godou was safe or not.

Ena turned her gaze to the pillow side by chance.

"Eh, what's that?"

"Something that Godou was carrying. It was kept in his pocket."

Erica answered. The object under the two girls' gaze was an arrowhead. An arrowhead crafted from steel. Plain and ordinary in appearance. However, it seemed to give off an air of calamity—Terrifying.

Also, the arrowhead was laid out over a purple silk wrapping cloth. This silk cloth had been used to wrap the arrowhead.

"Somehow I have the feeling I saw it somewhere before. Also, it was recently..."

Liliana felt puzzled as well.

None of these girls knew yet. This arrowhead was actually entrusted to Godou by the Princess of Glass. In addition, Kusanagi Godou had been shot by the same kind of arrowhead before in fact .

During the first battle against the "King of the End" in ancient Gaul, Godou had been struck by the lightning of salvation. Back then, Godou had taken a long time to recover from his coma. Even after waking up, his health had not returned to normal.

Turning the weapons bestowed upon Prince Rama into the form of lightning, that was the lightning of salvation.

The lightning that had caused Godou much hardship, its true identity was the poison arrow that had rendered the Devil King Campione in a state of coma. Furthermore, an arrow identical to those poison arrow—It was currently lying by the side of Godou's pillow.

Back in the Netherworld, Kusanagi Godou had come up with an idea.

'If only one Campione remains, Rama won't be able to use the great ritual of the covenant.'

Putting this solution into practice meant it was necessary to defeat all the other Campiones.

Reading this idea through the power of spirit vision, the Princess of Glass had bestowed this object upon Godou as a result. An arrowhead identical to the arrows for slaying Devil Kings.

However, Godou was not the only one to think of this plan.

In fact, the same idea had occurred to all seven of them—

"Alas... My revered brother! My most beloved kin of blood, most honorable and noble in the entire world!"

Facing Tokyo Bay at night, on a beach in Kisarazu...

A young man was standing there. He was lamenting and crying towards the ocean.

The young man's face was completely identical to Prince Rama who had perished several hours prior. However, unlike the great hero's pale complexion, his skin was tanned.

As the Devil King exterminating hero's younger brother by blood, he was the subordinate god protecting his elder brother as his shadow.

His name was Laksmana, the one who took on all distortion on behalf of his glorious elder brother. In addition, the white monkey god of wind was currently standing watch behind him.

Hanuman. In terms of heroic feats and great accomplishments, he was actually not inferior to his lord Rama.

People sang praises to the master-servant pair together as " Rama and Hanuman," not only in India but also various nations in Southeast Asia.

The showdown between the seven Devil Kings and the chosen hero was beginning at last.

Hence, the first battle concluded and it was time to quietly await the second battle's opening.

Afterword

Everyone, it's been a while. This is Takedzuki Jou.

This Volume 17 is where the extremely terrifying "strongest foe" officially enters the fray.

I never thought I'd really manage to write this far (wry laugh). I recall vaguely that at one point in the past, I thought to myself: the story might get wrapped up in a half-baked manner before he makes an appearance.

Future events are truly hard to predict. Inexplicably, I've been confronted with this thought lately.

In fact, back in my student days when I started writing for a small game company called Yuuentai(游), I never expected I would enter this field of work in the future.

My two seniors originating from that same company, Shinjou Kazuma-san and Gatoh Shoji-san, were already active as writers in the business, but back then, I was still small potatoes like a low-ranking soldier. After that, through a convoluted series of experiences over several years, I finally started writing novels.

It's all thanks to everyone's care and support that I can still continue to work in this field.

Let me take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to all readers.

So, to be honest, back when this series' theme of "defeating gods and taking their powers" flashed in my mind, the first enemy character I thought of was *him*.

But I didn't use the idea immediately.

Although he definitely offers plenty of substance as an antagonist, there were too many elements to him that can't be helped.

This is the "hero from the most epic myth in the orient," the " prototypical protagonist of wandering aristocrat stories," "sharing commonalities with a certain Japanese legend's protagonist," " similarities with the western hero Odysseus as well"... etc.

If all of these mysteries had to be unraveled within the first volume, it would have been too much work... Rather (laugh), it would have been too much of a shame.

Also, the recognition of his name is extremely low in Japan. Despite the fact that he is extremely well-known in Asia.

(Back in the past when I was searching about ancient Muay Thai boxing techniques on the internet, I was quite taken by surprise when I noticed his name as the founder of the art.)

Since there was no compelling need to put him as the first enemy, I used Athena, whom everyone knows, as the first antagonist. Then volumes kept increasing one after another

smoothly, an anime adaptation was even produced, finally reaching the current point.

(I think this is reaching the point of spoilers. To readers who cling to the habit of reading the afterword before the actual story, yet still obsessed with the true name of the "King of the End," please retreat from the afterword as quickly as possible and head to the main story.)

The mystery pervading the entire series is the question: "What is the name of the 'King of the End'?"

I wonder if any of the readers reached the correct answer?

The biggest hint was provided in Volume 12—5 volumes before this one. Although the answer to the riddle was revealed in Volume 17 already, compared to the many red herrings planted in Volume 13, the vague description in Volume 12 with the mysterious verses was actually the most direct hint to his true identity.

Even I find myself... rather malicious (wry smile).

Also, there was the hint of "once upon a time at a certain place" showing up in Volume 16.

I was thinking since so many hints have been gathered, there should be sufficient chance of guessing.

To everyone who rose to the challenge, did any of you succeed?

Moreover, about this riddle, if readers actually read Kaneseki Takeo-sensei's analyses on *Yuriwaka Daijin* as well as the venerable Minakata Kumagusu's *The Story of King Rama in Ancient Chinese and Japanese Texts*, their only reaction would be:

"Speaking from common sense, the answer can only be Prince Rama no matter how you look at it!"

An low-level riddle that might be answered immediately on the spot, possibly.

As a side note, the *Campione!* series has also been translated and published in Taiwan and Korea.

As to how widespread "Prince Rama and Hanuman" is recognized in these two regions, I'm sorry but I really don't have a good idea due to my lack of familiarity...

To readers of the Taiwanese and Korean versions, I wonder how hard the question was?

If a chance arises in the future, I hope to investigate and find out .

Speaking of Taiwan...

Not only was I invited to a manga exhibition held in Taipei City two years ago, but in the summer of 2014, I was invited again. I am truly grateful for that.

...However, last time was an autograph event related to *Campione!* while this time is an autograph event related to a certain publisher's *Leviathan* series (wry smile). Whether the first or the second time, I was quite astounded by the number of people attending. I am truly grateful for everyone's support.

Also, after the autograph events ended, I was able to meet many readers while taking leisurely walks inside the venues.

I can't believe they recognized me. What a surprise (laugh).

Also during last time's autograph event, there was the gentleman who had gotten injured on his way to the venue. I never thought I would meet you again. Please take care and I thank you for your continued support.

Well then. Before the ultimate showdown against the strongest hero, let alone cooperating with unity, an air of internal strife is brewing between the various Devil Kings instead.

But before the story with the tentative title of *Civil War Among Devil Kings*...

A volume gathering stories already released in various places with new content is planned to be published first.

The new content is currently under review but "The Incident Involving the Young Marquis, Onee-sama and the Eternal Beauty Gathered Together" is also one of the candidates.

Also, *Chronicle Legion*, my latest project at the new label, Dash X Bunko, which has been announced already, is set to be published.

You might get vibes of a mecha series from the special promotional website, but the content is actually totally different (wry laugh).

"Write some kind of novel with fantasy military fiction as the genre!" In response to this order, I used "Fantasy military novels are a dime a dozen nowadays. It'll become outdated by the time the book is published" as an argument of twisted logic, thus allowing me to go my own way as usual.

In terms of genre, it's probably more like fantasy-*ish* military fiction.

The setting is late twentieth century. The various ideas including "reviving in modern times due to unknown reasons, the ancient Roman hero Caesar has established a new empire," "*legions* of giants powered by artificial ectoplasmic fluid," "a battle of nation acquisition between commanders who summon and direct *legions*," "an imperial princess," "warriors awakened from the ancient world," "a planet Earth where fantasy creatures and spirits exist for some reason," I put my own spin on them as usual based on my own hobbies and interests.

If interested, dear readers, please try reading my next story.

So long for now.

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ 1 Corinthians 15:40
2. ↑ 1 Corinthians 15:41-42
3. ↑ 1 Corinthians 15:43-44
4. ↑ 1 Corinthians 15:45,52
5. ↑ Revelation 1:8
6. ↑ **Tianshan Tonglao**(天): literally the Youthful Old Lady of the Celestial Mountains, a character from the Chinese martial arts novel *Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils*(天) by renowned author Jin Yong.[1]
7. ↑ *Ministers and Generals to the Afterlife*(相), by the Chinese Poet Wang Fanzhi() from the Tang dynasty.
8. ↑ Joshua 6:16,21
9. ↑ Numbers 31:7